



My Name is Afrika: Setswana Genealogies, Trans-Atlantic Interlocutions, and NOW-Time in Keorapetse Kgositsile's Life and Work

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Cape Town, in fulfilment to the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, at the University of Cape Town. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination at any other university.

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_____ day of _____ 2016

Supervision: Prof. Meg Samuelson, Prof. Harry Garuba, Dr Khwezi Mkhize

Earth my Body
Water my Blood
Air my Breath
Fire my Spirit

Abstract

My Name is Afrika: Setswana Genealogies, Trans-Atlantic Interlocutions, and NOW-Time in Keorapetse Kgositsile's Life and Work

South African poet laureate Keorapetse Kgositsile lived in extraordinary times marked by extraordinary challenges and changes. Born in 1938, exactly a decade before the draconian apartheid regime came into power, his life and work emerge from the milieus of British colonial South Africa, apartheid South Africa, civil rights America, anti-apartheid movements, anti-colonial wars in Africa, anti-imperialism in Asia, cold war politics, and the eventual demise of both the Berlin wall and the apartheid regime in South Africa. His poetry responds to these times in illuminating ways. His poetic influences point to his Tswana-centred upbringing, his encounter with Afro-American oral and literary traditions, the styles and poetics of *Drum* writers, the outpouring of African literature he received from the Makerere conference of Uganda, and anti-colonial critical thinkers from Africa and its diaspora. At age twenty three, post-Sharpeville massacres, he was sent into exile by the leadership of the ANC, and he took with him a corpus of Tswana literature which would in/form his poetic. He readily immersed himself in the oral and written tradition of Afro-America while in exile in the United States of America. His work interweaves the oral and literary traditions of black South Africa and black America, revealing a dynamic and complex relationship between the two geographical sites. Where oral traditions have largely been left out of the broader narrative of modernity, this study demonstrates how oral traditions remain alive and are reinvigorated, providing a resource that is then carried across the Atlantic and renewed in translation, rather than left behind to ossify. Kgositsile's prominent presence in black international periodicals and his collaborations with other diasporic cultural, political and musical figures there show that the relationship between the two geographical sites is more complex than its current positioning of Afro-America as a vanguard on which Africans model themselves. Through a reading of Kgositsile's revolutionary poetry, this study also shows how the indigenous resource base enables him to resolve the agonising temporal and spatial tensions presented by modernity's colonialism. He coins concepts that re-enchant the world through a poetic that fosters a dialogue between past and future, and traditional and modern in a simultaneous present he deems the NOW-time.

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and always.

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Chapter One: Introduction

There is [...] some uneasiness
about the haunting shadow of
Africa in the making of modern
culture, a feeling that the continent
is both within the grand narrative
of modernity but outside it
(Gikandi, 1996: 2).

Scholarship on the relationship between black South Africa and black America in the twentieth century propelled me to undertake this research. This interest was borne out of experiential affiliations I was excited to discover between the two disparate geographies in my youth, mostly through hip hop music and jazz. Through the name, music and iconography of Afrika Bambaataa and the Zulu Nation, it dawned upon me that they were actively attempting to recover an African aesthetic and consciousness through South African anti-colonial history, and furthermore aligning their allegiances and identities with that part of the continent. Deemed rap music pioneers through which the hip hop nation was born, Afrika Bambaataa espoused a nationalist approach to hip hop after Nation of Islam leader Elijah Muhammad's death in 1975. Bambaataa points to a 1964 movie *Zulu* as inspiration for their name. The epic war film depicts the Anglo-Zulu wars of both the Battle of Isandlwana and the Battle of Rorke's Drift in 1879, in which the British suffer a crushing defeat under the hands of the Zulus. Witnessing the brute force of the Zulus bravely defending themselves against colonialists, the young men "summoned into existence the Zulu Nation in New York City's South Bronx in an attempt to bring about peace in a region increasingly prone to gang violence" (Decker, 1993: 56). The Zulu Nation—"the single most enduring institution in hip hop" (George, 2004: 45)—became a banner under which nation-conscious rapper would unite.

I am fascinated by the long-standing rapprochements between the two loci that stretch back to as early as the late nineteenth century. In his 'Booker T. Washington and African Nationalism' (1974) Manning Marable shows how John Langalibalele Dube, Pixley Ka Isaka Seme¹, and Davidson Jabavu were profoundly influenced by Washington and his Tuskegee Institute at the turn of the twentieth century. Tuskegee's methods were deployed to

¹ In their correspondences Seme is recorded as being profoundly inspired by Washington, proclaiming, "we need your spirit in South Africa" (Marable, 1974: 401).

establish education for the natives of South Africa. Dube subsequently opened the Ohlange Institute in Natal in 1901, whilst Jabavu “helped to establish the South African Native College at Fort Hare, based in part on Tuskegee’s curriculum” (Marable, 1974: 402). Marable notes, “black American guidance was essential for Africans to organize and uplift themselves” (ibid: 398), and Hunt Davis deems Dube “a South African exponent of Booker T. Washington” (1975). Robert Hill and Gregory Pirio further demonstrate how The Universal Negro Improvement Association and African Communities deeply influenced South Africa’s quest for black nationalism post-world war one. African National Congress General Secretary of the ‘African land settlement’ scheme in Cape Town, James Thaele “infused the activities of the Western Cape Congress with the symbols and rituals of Garveyism. Thus, the official organ for the Cape ANC was named *The African World* to identify [...] with Garvey’s popular *Negro World*. The slogan of the former journal—Africa for the Africans and Europe for the Europeans—was also transparently Garveyite in its provenance” (1987: 234). The self-styling of South African letters on those of Afro-America is also evident in the formation of the New African Movement, modelled on the New Negro Movement².

Other scholarship that makes comparative analyses are Tim Couzens, whose *The New African* (1985) studies the American philanthropy in the 1920s and 1930s, which inaugurated black libraries such as the Bantu Men’s Social Centre. Rob Nixon’s *Homelands, Harlem, and Hollywood* (1994) explores the dynamic relationship between black South Africans and Afro-Americans during the *Drum* decade when the former fashioned their emerging modernity and cosmopolitanism on the latter. Ofole Mgbako’s paper ‘My Blackness is the Beauty of this Land’ (2009) focuses on the impact African American literature had on the Black Consciousness Movement’s (BCM) early definitions and assertions of black identity, as does Peter Horn in his paper ‘When it Rains it Pours: U.S. Black Consciousness and Lyric Poetry in South Africa’ (2007). Michael Titlestad’s work importantly maps transatlantic circulation of music, and how black South Africans deployed jazz as a trope of self-stylization and representation. Exchanges between cultural figures also constitute a rich transatlantic textuality: “the writings of Richard Wright were exemplary for the Sophiatown authors, amongst them Ezekiel Mphahlele, Bloke Modisane and Richard Rive” (Masilela, 2004: 32);

² Masilela notes that the first New African intellectuals “felt the historical necessity of either making reference to New Negro modernity while participating in the construction of New African modernity or appropriated the historical lessons of the New Negro Movement in order to make sense and intervene actively in the unfolding of the New African Movement” (Masilela, 2003: 4).

and also through jazz as observed in the relationship between Sathima Bea Benjamin/Abdullah Ibrahim and Duke Ellington (Barry Gilder, 1983; Carol Muller, 2007).

What plagued me about these accounts of vibrant transnational exchanges was that black South Africans were mostly positioned as imbibers of Afro-American culture, and depicted as emulators of their Afro-American counterparts. This echoes Laura Chrisman's study of the relationship between Sol Plaatje and W.E.B Du Bois which challenges certain proponents of "black Atlanticism [that] (unintentionally) give primacy to diasporic Africans as the exemplars of modernity that Africans seek to emulate" (Chrisman, 2002: 1). In her analysis of the relationship between Plaatjie and Du Bois, Chrisman argues that "Plaatjie's keen awareness of the different inflections of modernity means that he takes a distinctly radical, collectivist and materialist approach to social transformation and the role of literature in it, an approach thoroughly informed by his South African context" (Olver & Meyer, 2011: 8). She argues that a "modern South African political culture is also born [...] from a desire to push Afro-America into cognizance of, and dialogue with, *distinctive forms of black South African agency*. This agency demands not only dialogue, but also transformation, of that black American partner" (Chrisman, 2000: 16; my emphasis). Black South Africa's agency in these multivalent shuttling of ideas, people and texts is also the focus of Stéphane Robolin's research (2012; 2015). These colleagues have laid some of the groundwork, and have inspired me to further this scholarship.

Having already been privy to the dynamic relationship between Afrika Bambaataa and The Zulu Nation as one clear example on how Afro-Americans can model themselves on black South African culture, I ventured on a search for a South African literary figure who perhaps lived in the United States of America, and whose work could have made an impact of Afro-American literary culture. In my intellectual peregrinations a memory of how an Afro-American spoken word group were inspired by a South African poet in the coinage of their name resurfaced. When South Africa celebrated the return of their formerly-exiled poet Keorapetse Kgositsile, who became that country's national poet laureate in 2006, I yearned to meet that cultural figure who was famed with bequeathing Afro-American spoken word group The Last Poets with its name. If Afrika Bambaataa and the Zulu Nation were rap music pioneers, then the spoken word outfit The Last Poets are considered the antecedents of that rap movement; "the forebears of rap" (Ards, 2004: 312).

Emerging out of civil rights and black power movements in the late 1960s New York City's Harlem borough, The Last Poets' deep sixties cultural and political roots are owed to the radical movements of the time, most importantly the Black Arts Movement (BAM). Kgositsile, who was sent into exile by the African National Congress in 1961 and moved to New York City in 1962, was a central figure of BAM—a radical group of writer-activists whose “aesthetics were, in fact, understood as historically-situated cultural *practices* which could be rehearsed, learned, and performed for specific political ends” (Jaji, 2009: 291; original emphasis). It was through this circuitry that The Last Poets encountered Kgositsile's poem ‘Towards a Walk in the Sun’, which boldly proclaimed the end of poetry and the beginning of revolutionary war, making a call for foot soldiers. The young New Yorkers answered the incendiary South African by calling themselves The Last Poets of the world, and proceeded to rehearse, learn and perform his aesthetics and decolonial politics.

My contribution to scholarship on black South African and black American relations is the pivotal bridging figure of Kgositsile, whose work intricately interweaves oral and literary traditions of both cultures. Stephen Henderson writes of him: “Willy [Kgositsile] speaks from Black Africa to Black America; from Black America to Black Africa. He is of both worlds but not divided. There is a powerful harmony within him, a universal blackness” (Henderson, 1969: 118). This study therefore strives to reveal dynamic multivalent streams of influence between the two geographic loci in that scholarship. It is disturbed by the haunting shadow of Africa in the making of modern culture, as Simon Gikandi puts it, “a feeling that the continent is both within the grand narrative of modernity but outside of it” (Gikandi, 1996: 2). More particularly, it excavates and examines Kgositsile's Setswana-centred upbringing and the corpus of Setswana literary classics that he chose to carry with him across the Atlantic to begin his four decades of exile. From this engagement with his cultural reservoir, I map and reveal how indigenous knowledge systems travel and get disseminated.

I investigate the role of Setswana language and literatures, as well as other southern African oratory and literary practices, in Kgositsile's poetry. Those are the uniting elements of the chapters in this dissertation. I map the genealogies of Setswana in Kgositsile's life, and track how that language and its practices travel, is “strategically transformed” (Quayson, 1997) into his English collections, and how those collections are consequently considered a resource base from which diaspora cultures engender poetics. As alluded by Henderson, Kgositsile's poetic speaks from black Africa to black America; and from black America to black Africa.

Read within the frameworks of black Atlanticism and black internationalism, we are presented with an oeuvre that exemplifies how discourses of the African diaspora, marked by difference, travel, and I make a case for the place of African oral traditions in the diaspora. Scholarship on the relationship between Africa and its diaspora is wrought with tensions. The main cause of this uneasiness is Africa's position in diaspora studies, which were theorised in a manner that reframes the diaspora space as a vibrant, transformative locus of black cultural engagement by Paul Gilroy. He christened that space *The Black Atlantic* (1993). The scope of Gilroy's "the black Atlantic" provided a platform for studying transnational and transoceanic exchanges across the Atlantic.

Gilroy observes that within African-American cultural studies there "is a quiet cultural nationalism which pervades the work of some radical thinkers", a type of "crypto-nationalism" that "means that they are often disinclined to consider the cross catalytic or transverse dynamics of racial politics as a significant element in the formation and reproduction of English national identities" (Gilroy, 1993: 4). Within black America's histories of cultural and political debates in particular, he observes "the lure of ethnic particularism and nationalism [that] has provided an ever-lasting danger" (ibid). The danger is informed by the "narrowness of vision which is content with the merely national" (ibid). This nationalism espouses and celebrates an identity that is shaped by "roots", where an organic link to Africa as origins is cherished. This presents a preoccupation with nationality, and inevitably with essentialism in movements such as Afrocentricism.

Gilroy's argues that the term diaspora is "essentially symbolic" and points to "the fact that there can be no pure, uncontaminated or essential blackness anchored in an unsullied originary moment" (Gilroy, 1993: 309). As such he argues against diaspora positions that are "antithetical to the rhizomorphic, fractal structure of the transcultural, international formation" of the black Atlantic (ibid: 3). He "desire[s] to transcend both the structures of the nation state and constraints of ethnicity and national particularities" (ibid: 19), and argues that these structures are preoccupied with "roots". He rather espouses an anti-essentialist and anti-nationalist subjectivity, which he associates with "routes". He proposes we rather view the ship of the Middle Passage as a site of origins in studying black Atlantic cultures.

Gilroy's text is path-breaking in the ways it departs from Afrocentric or African nationalist positions on diaspora. He grounds his argument in favour of "routes" in the mutual

relationship between modernity and slavery, and argues that the black Atlantic emerged as “a distinctive counterculture to modernity” (ibid: 36). As such Gilroy’s view of black Atlanticism prioritizes black modernity established across the Atlantic as the vanguard:

The distinctive historical experiences of diaspora’s populations have created a unique body of reflections on modernity and its discontents which is an enduring presence in the cultural and political struggles of their descendants today (ibid: 45).

While Gilroy’s study offers a significant launching pad for this thesis, I will argue against this claim of uniqueness by revealing similar reflections that emerge from experiences grounded in nationalist, decolonising projects in Africa. I use Kgositsile’s life and writing to trace such experiences from other inflections of modernity on the continent. He carried with him *other* countercultures of modernity drawn from the continent and nationalist structures, and fused them with those of black America.

Gilroy’s formulations of an anti-essentialist and anti-nationalist black Atlanticism have resulted in this oversight of other countercultures of modernity on the continent. Chrisman is concerned with that lapse, and rightly points out “the risk that transatlanticism can pose to critical understanding of African nationalism” (Chrisman, 2000: 13). In her reckoning one of the key problems is the “way that [Gilroy’s] discourse of transnational modernity meshes with Africanists who actually rejected his paradigms” (ibid). She argues that the transatlantic political and cultural flows between black South Africa and black America need “an analysis that is alert [...] to the historical variability and complexity of the dynamic”, and one that does not “distort [modern South African political culture] by neglecting its formation through and against European colonialism” (ibid: 14). This has been largely the source of the tensions in scholarship on diasporic exchanges: the place of Africa in modernity. Gilroy’s counterculture to modernity is mystified by the “image of Africa as anterior to modernity”, as Goyal contends (Goyal, 2014: v). The ship as a site of origins for these black Atlantic cultures severs Africa from the growing body of black modernity, further reinforcing the false colonial perception that Africa’s cultures are moribund. Gilroy’s prioritising routes over roots, and linking modernity to slavery neglects the place of someone like Kgositsile in the making of Afro-American culture.

It is here that my research makes an intervention. I demonstrate that it is possible to work within the black Atlantic framework without granting routes priority over roots. I argue for theorizing a relationship to Africa within a post-essentialist framework, through focusing on Kgositsile's practice of interweaving Afro-American vernacular and artistic traditions with black southern African indigenous resource base, destabilising the binary positioning of essentialism and non-essentialism. I join critics such as Masilela, Gikandi, Chrisman and Yogita Goyal in offering a revisioning of the black Atlantic. Two special issues of the journal *Research in African Literature* devoted to this subject were published in 1996 and 2014. In his introduction of the 1996 issue, Gikandi reminds us of the "ambiguous ways in which margins and centres are conflated or blurred, [and] the processes of *fusion* and *fission* that brings them together and also separates them (1996: 5; my emphasis). He adds, "our challenge as students of literature and culture in Africa and its Diaspora is perhaps to recenter such contrapuntal relations in any diasporic or postcolonial agenda" (ibid). I take on that challenge and show that the exploration of roots is not necessarily incompatible with the tracing of routes in examining the relationship between African oral and written narrative, and Afro-American artistic traditions, in Kgositsile's work.

This is achieved through proposing a model that "simultaneously foregrounds Africa in a non-essentialising manner and recognises the trajectories and transformations occasioned by the itineraries of history" (Garuba, 2010: 240). That model allows us to track the "strategic transformations" (Quayson, 1997) of Setswana oral and literary practices in Kgositsile's poetry, showing that the African oral traditions remain alive and are reinvigorated, providing a resource that is then carried across the Atlantic and renewed in translation, instead of being left behind to ossify. A model that allows mapping Setswana genealogies reveals "a continuous stream of collective consciousness from the traditional to the modern" (Quayson, 1997: 6). Through reading the cultures of black internationalism in *translation*, as proposed by Brent Edwards (2003), we are able to map how those discourses travel, are translated, disseminated and reformulated in those transnational contexts. This offers a post-essentialist framework within which we can read and position Africa's relationship with its diaspora.

Kgositsile's involvement with BAM, his appearance in that movement's seminal anthology *Black Fire: An Anthology of Afro-American Writings* (1968), and the publication of his collections by Third World and Broadside Press should necessarily complicate the identity of BAM, which is historically thought of as Afro-American. The neat and simplified packaging

of that movement as Afro-American, thereby being exemplary of a “counterculture of modernity” (Gilroy, 1993), has left Kgositsile’s work out of the historical Black Power moment, and (South) Africa out of the making of black modernity. These complex relationships are what fuels Margo Crawford to proclaim that “the story of black diasporic relations during the Black Arts Movement is only beginning to unfold” (Crawford, 2007: 119). This objective is met through demonstrating how, in BAM’s seminal text *Black Fire*, members of The Last Poets, in search of a name with which to inaugurate themselves as a socio-politically conscious group, found Kgositsile’s poem ‘Towards a Walk in the Sun’ resonant with their political aspirations, and deployed it in coining a name. They did not only name themselves after his decolonial vision, but they also proceeded to use his poetry, itself drawing from Setswana oratory and literary practices, as a resource base to shape their poetic. The Last Poets’ poetry influenced the emergence of rap, and as purported grandfathers of rap, this study will also point to southern Africa as one of the inflections of the origins of rap.

This study reveals how the cultural treasure of Setswana and other southern African cosmological practices enable Kgositsile to dismantle modernity’s monumentalised time and reconfigure African and diasporic spaces. The dismantling of modernity’s time is informed by the conception of human existence that challenges the Cartesian fundamental division between I and the world, subject and object, and knower and known. From Kgositsile’s cultural treasure of southern African cosmology, earth is a living land composite of the living larger cosmos, with a living language and a pulsating “pastpresentfuture” time called “NOW”. As such even the language deployed in his poetry is a living language to signify the dynamism of reality. As he tells us, in his “language [...] the people never spoke directly about a thing, they spoke around it so that it stood out more clearly” (*Negro Digest*, 1969: 57). This way his people mythify reality as opposed to speak of it in symmetrical representation because “words are not meant to be used merely as labels, for they also serve as *active agents*” (Kunene, 1992: 37; my emphasis). Through coining his concepts of “NOW”, “coil of time” and “future memory”, Kgositsile accounts for a re-enchanted reality whose language emerges from animist modes of thought that give the living land and its composite cosmos their due agency in their co-constitutive being and becoming.

1.1 Reading Kgositsile: A Literature Review

Kgositsile is an under-studied writer. His presence in civil rights America and its radical movements, his commitment to black liberation as both a cultural and political project, and the horizon of his pan-African literary vision positions him as a man of letters worthy of pursuing scholarship on. His numerous publications of poetry collections and his presence in a range of black internationalist periodicals place an intellectual bridge of transatlanticism based on political solidarity, intellectual affiliations, cultural retainments and historical memory, to use Masilela's words (1996: 90). Kgositsile does not enjoy scholarly attention as much as his contemporaries Dennis Brutus and Mazisi Kunene do. As a writer praised for bridging black South Africa and black America³, Kgositsile's life and work does not feature sufficiently in either the studies of South African protest writing under apartheid, nor in African-American literary history of that era, prompting scholars such as Margo Crawford (2007) and Mukti Mangharam (2013) to view him as a liminal figure. This has created an unfortunate oversight of his important work, especially in his country which he now serves as national poet laureate (2006—).

Eugene Redmond's seminal book *Drum Voices: The Mission of Afro-American Poetry* (1976) is important in locating Kgositsile at the centre of black arts in America: "he assays the whole of our tumultuous times (in Africa and America), intermingling an acquired black street language with a demanding and stringent form" (Redmond, 1976: 402) He rightly states that Kgositsile's presence and the importance of his interaction with Afro-Americans cannot be overemphasized" (ibid: 306). John Povey also undertook a study of 'Three South African Poets: Dennis Brutus, Keorapetse Kgositsile, and Oswald Mbuyiseni Mtshali' (1977), where he reads Kgositsile's anger, "defiant", "aggressive", "febrile", and "often scatological" lines (1977: 271) in a manner that needs revising⁴, which I do in Chapter Four. In his paper 'The Voice of Prophecy in African Poetry' (1979) Mphahlele reads Kgositsile's revolutionary poetry "as an act of faith only prophets can sustain" (1979: 39). Its roots lie, as Mphahlele posits, "in the public voice, the communal song and dance", "both akin to oral poetry and a departure from it" (ibid: 41). This voice of prophecy and its emergence from the oral resource base is pivotal to its dissemination and influence in the diaspora.

³ The blurb on his magnum opus *My Name is Afrika* (1971) reads: "a unique and emotional definition of the African and American Black Experience".

⁴ Kgositsile tells Rowell, "I once saw an article in *African Arts* ... in which a white cat—I think it was John Povey—tried to make a comparison between me, or my work, and Mtshali's. He said that mine essentially, I suppose, is loud because I am in exile and that I don't suffer every day like Mtshali. He added that because Mtshali has to deal every day with oppression, his anger, his militancy, is distilled" (1978: 36).

Four interviews have been conducted with Kgositsile at key moments in his life. In Charles Rowell's important paper 'With Bloodstains to Testify: An Interview with Keorapetse Kgositsile' (1978) the two men engage in a discussion ranging from growing up in Johannesburg under the watchful eye of the apartheid regime, Kgositsile's first attempts at writing, his first encounter with Afro-American literature, moving to the U.S., the Lincoln University days, black music, black arts, contemporary black South African poetry, negritude, and broader African literature. This interview is pivotal to my research. Kgositsile also appears in *Out of Exile: South African Writers Speak* (1992), interviewed alongside Albie Sachs, Lewis Nkosi, Mbulelo Mzamane, Breyten Breytenbach, and Dennis Brutus. Kalamu ya Salaam has also published his 'Interview with Keorapetse 'Willie' Kgositsile' in 1991. They discuss the similarities and differences between the black experience in South Africa and America, as well as language and aesthetics in Kgositsile's work, which I build up on in this dissertation. A short discussion between Kgositsile and Danille Taylor-Guthrie (1996) in which they discuss the Bigger Thomas' blind rebellion in Richard Wright's *Native Son* amongst other things, is also significant.

Kgositsile's papers 'Culture and Resistance in South Africa' (1986), 'Crossing Borders Without Leaving' (1991), and 'Culture as a Site of Struggle' (1992) are fundamental in revealing his approaches to literature and politics, literary criticism, and intersections between his life and work. He participated in public talks that are published, such as the 'Panel on Literature and Commitment in South Africa' with Dennis Brutus, Chinua Achebe and Ali Mazrui which highlights the tensions and debates of the time in African literature.

His poems appear in a number of African and American anthologies, but rarely in South African ones. An anthology such as *Seasons Come to Pass* (1994), compiled by Es'kia Mphahlele, is an example of Kgositsile's precarious position in South African literary history. The title of that anthology is a line from Mongane Serote's poem 'For Don M.—Banned' (1974), but what is little known is that the line is appropriated from Kgositsile's 'My Name is Afrika' (1969). Kgositsile's poetry does not feature in that anthology. I also have not come across any scholarship that links Serote's title of his debut novel *To Every Birth is Blood* (1981) to Kgositsile's above-mentioned poem, from which Serote's title directly derives.

Four American scholars have undertaken major research on his work. Margo Crawford researched Kgositsile's precarious inside/outside position in the BAM, showing how his

presence provided “the materiality of Africa” (2007: 113) that his Afro-American counterparts sought in the making of their identities. Mukti Mangharam argues that Kgositsile’s “black body existed in a space of in-betweenness; it was simultaneously American and African, suggesting that national struggles or justice, such as that against apartheid and racist segregation, only acquired meaning through universalizing discourses within transnational imaginaries” (Mangharam, 2013: 81). I discuss the two other studies on Kgositsile below, engaging with them to situate my particular intervention.

In her paper ‘Sound Effects: Synaesthesia As Purposeful Distortion in Keorapetse Kgositsile’s Poetry’ (2009), which she in effect elaborates on in her *Africa in Stereo: Modernism, Music, and Pan-African Solidarity* (2014), Jaji argues that “through citations of specific musicians, compositions and performance practices, Kgositsile allows the aural sensory mode of listening to music to structure visual, haptic, and other metaphors as part of a generalized strategy of synaesthesia in his poetry. Just as synaesthesia relies on producing identification between different sensory modes [...] so it can be extended as a metaphor for solidarity alongside difference, and in Kgositsile’s writing it is used to figure solidarity between African-American and South African liberation struggles” (Jaji, 2009: 287-8). She argues against the logic of essentialism and adapts Edouard Glissant’s ‘Relation’ since it “allows for a consensual rather than forced sharing, and maintains a place for continued practice and production of heterogeneity within this sharing” (ibid: 288). Jaji continues, “it is striking that Glissant sees the *Creole* language as the clearest expression of Relation and describes it in terms that closely parallel jazz improvisation [...] By drawing on diaspora music, particularly jazz and soul, Kgositsile’s poetics of purposeful distortion figure solidarity as a dynamic performance of rhizomatic improvisational Relation rather than a rigid state of rooted monotone Unison” (ibid: 288-9; my emphasis). This is useful in providing relational frames that draw parallels between a solidarity of the sense with that of pan-Africa. I offer a different approach through a post-essentialist conceptual framework that gives Africa oral traditions resource base its due position in Kgositsile’s fostering of solidarity through poetic and musical practices.

Jaji argues that Kgositsile adopts the strategy of creative distortion *détour*—which she theorises as the opposite of a “Return to Africa as tending towards totalizing visions”—in order to come into Relation with diasporic cultures. As such, *détour* informs what Jaji calls “purposeful distortion” which she argues allows Kgositsile fluidity as opposed to rigidity. Jaji

also designates *simultaneity* as a form of “temporal detours into the present” (Jaji, 2009: 292-3), which also helps her argue for “purposeful distortion”. These two concepts offer us a meaty bone to chew on with regards to Kgositsile’s poetry and the reading thereof. As mentioned before, using Glissant’s theories on Caribbean poetics to read Kgositsile’s work presents us with challenges that are primarily related to geo-specificity. The notion of *détour* as opposed to Return being the most important. Given that Kgositsile is not a Middle-Passage-diasporan but a South African exile living in the diaspora, the notion of *détour* may be of limited value. I therefore propose to supplement it with the principle of “*movement*” and “*continuity*” as the fundamental logic of solidarity. This is derived from Kgositsile’s ‘A Poet’s Credo’ published in the *Negro Digest* of July 1968. In it he proclaims;

there is nothing like art—in the oppressor's sense of art. There is only movement. Force. Creative power. The walk of Sophiatown *tsotsi* or my Harlem brother on Lenox Avenue. Field Hollers. The Blues. A Trane riff. Marvin Gaye or *mbaqanga*. Anguished happiness. Creative power, in whatever form it is released, moves like the dancer's muscles. But the impulse is personal (*Negro Digest*, 1968: 42).

Here Kgositsile celebrates the philosophy of movement and fluidity as opposed to stasis. Sophiatown and Harlem are reconfigured through the force of continuity. The movements of these two ‘brothers’ are in sync, and they move with a dancer’s muscle that unites them in solidarity. Movement is descriptive of growth and rebirth, as Mazisi Kunene elucidates, and “movement in dance can only express the solidarity of the group if the group moves in a direction that complements the others—the circle and the movement within the circle” (Kunene, 1977: 22). As such, through peripatetic movements of the two brothers in Sophiatown and Harlem (Kgositsile therein transposed), and through field hollers, blues, jazz, soul and *mbaqanga*, Kgositsile is able to find rebirth: continuity. The same may be said about the revolutionary movements on the continent and its diaspora that he unites through this principle. He expresses this in the credo, “the sensitive spring of my sensibility is pressed against the essence of my *being* and *becoming*—the constant broadening of my consciousness and conscience. Thus my life is or has become *constant beginning*” (1968: 42; my emphasis). In his conception of reality marked by movement, his being is involved in a lively enfolding process of becoming that is shaped by complementary dances in his life. This is shaped by southern African cosmologies and mythologies of a living land.

Kgositsile opposes and contradistinguishes the finitudes of “the oppressor’s sense of art”, with the excesses of black life, thereby questioning language and the finitudes of representation as a discursive practice. The signifier ‘art’, in a western sense, sets limits and boundaries to what constitutes art, making discursive practices boundary-making practices in an ontic and semantic sense. The finitudes of the signifier ‘art’ makes meaning the property of ‘the oppressor’ as opposed to an “ongoing performance of the world in its differential dance of intelligibility and unintelligibility [where] part of the world becomes determinately bounded and propertied in its emergent intelligibility to another part of the world” (Barad, 2007: 149)⁵. The discursive practice of representation is therefore an exclusionary practice that tyrannically dictates the frame of intelligibility. Representation has to do with an immutable reality where fixed words are able to mirror pre-existing phenomena. In Kgositsile’s writing language is an active agent to signal movement and continuity in spatiality, bringing differences in relation through a lively enfolding process, interweaving Africa on the continent with Africa in America. Rather than essentialist or anti-essentialist his poetic enfolds Africa with America, and past, present and future (what Jaji calls “temporal detours into the present”).

In his *Grounds of Engagement: Apartheid-Era African American and South African Writing* Stéphane Robolin grapples with issues of space and contends, “repositioning these geopolitical spaces to redefine their relationship militates against a conventional view that takes these cartographies to occupy wholly distinct hemispheres and seditiously opposes a (nationally) separatist logic” (2015). He deploys “grounds” to signal that, “in both contexts, space continues to be a key modality through which race is experienced, defined, produced, and reproduced” (2015: 6). “Produced”, he argues, “refers not to the writing and publication of a literary text, but rather to literature’s generative role in shaping the imaginaries and perceptions of black South Africans and African Americans. That is, they were not just written about, but also written into being” (2015: 12). As such, “Kgositsile’s linking of South African and U.S. sites provokes a reevaluation of physical space and its conventional meanings. In effect, his poetry asks us to conceive of geography differently—here, governed far less by physical *contiguity* than by experiential *continuity*” (2015: 89; original emphasis). Robolin shows how Kgositsile’s poetry at times “brings time and space into powerful synthesis” denying “the spiritual or psychic breach that distance represents”, in his discussion

⁵ Karen Barad is not writing about Kgositsile here, but about matter within the discipline of physics, arguing that matter should matter in the social sciences too.

on ‘Dilemmas of Distance and Difference’ (2015, 89-90). My study builds on and extends this by pointing to the southern African oral traditions resource base as enabling a contravening of spiritual and psychic breaches that distance and temporality present.

Mukti Lakhi Mangharam’s paper “‘The Universal is the Entire Collection of Particulars’: Grounding Identity in a Shared Horizon of Humanity” (2013) cites Kgositsile as being preoccupied with how “black writers must focus on including their particular experiences as black individuals into their work. [...] Vision [...] is always connected with a specific world view that exist in spite of the writer [...] All it means is that whoever it is has dipped into some collective reservoir, come out inspired enough to isolate some aspects of our existence, and explores it or sings its connectedness—past, present, or future—to the collected or collective desire, purpose, wisdom, values” (Kgositsile in Mangharam, 2013: 88). Setswana and southern African resource bases shape Kgositsile’s specific world view, and from that collective reservoir he is able to distinguish himself as a (South) African poet within BAM, and through finding continuity and connectedness of Afro-American and black South African struggles, he is able to sing of their collective desire, values and wisdom. This necessarily means in reading the history and aesthetic of the BAM, we must necessarily look to South Africa for Kgositsile’s isolated aspects of his existence in shaping that movement’s identity, which in essence offers a methodology of how “the story of black diasporic relations during the Black Arts Movement [can begin] to unfold”, as Crawford (2007: 119) compels us. This study begins that unfolding process.

1.2 Post-Essentialism: Theoretical Framework

Yogita Goyal’s troubling observation that “the new discourse of diaspora seems unable to theorize a relationship to Africa within a post-essentialist framework” (Goyal, 2003: 24) provides a conceptual framework for this research. At the centre of this inability is the bifurcation of essentialism and non-essentialism. I identify as the fundamental issue the contradistinction between *roots* and *routes*, which are uneasily poised in a binary tension by Paul Gilroy’s *The Black Atlantic*. Gilroy’s *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993) aims to transcend nation state, ethnicity and national particularity in favour of the “more difficult option: the theorization of creolisation, métissage, mestizaje, and hybridity” (1993: 2). Therefore Gilroy reframes the space of the Atlantic as a vibrant,

transformative locus of black cultural engagement, rapprochement, interlocution, and exchange. He proposes a new chronotope that shapes his argument:

I have settled on the image of ships in motion across the spaces between Europe, America, Africa, and the Caribbean as a central organising symbol for this enterprise as my starting point. The image of the ship—a living, micro-cultural, micro-political system in motion—is especially important for historical and theoretical reasons that I hope will become clearer [...] Ships immediately focus attention on the middle passage, on the various projects for redemptive return to an African homeland, on the circulation of ideas and activists as well as the movement of key cultural and political artefacts: tracts, books, gramophone records, and choirs (1993: 4).

Gilroy's focus on the ship as a site of origin, thereby 'solving' the problem of nation state, ethnicity and national particularity, essentially dehistoricizes the black diaspora, as well as oversimplifies the identities and ethnicities of the circulating activists and their ideas and books. The confluence of Tswana oral and literary practice with those of Afro-America presents a challenge in Gilroy's 'solution'. He contends, "the history of the black Atlantic [...] continually crisscrossed by the movements of black people—not only as commodities but engaged in various struggles towards emancipation, autonomy, and citizenship—provides a means to reexamine the problems of *nationality*, *location*, *identity*, and *historical memory*" (1993: 15-16; my emphasis). He articulates an anti-nationalist and anti-essentialist approach to black Atlantic cultures, and argues; "marked by its European origins, modern black political culture has always been more interested in the relationship of identity to *roots* and rootedness than in seeing identity as a process of movement and mediation that is more appropriately approached via the homonym *routes*" (1993: 19; my emphasis).

The ship signals *routes* and the move away from land-based *rootedness* which often brings to fore problems of nationality, location, identity and historical memory. Except in the case of Kgosisile's poetry where roots confluence with routes, redefining trans/nationalism, dis/location, and the place of historical memory in the diaspora: what I call *roots en route*⁶. What happens when *nationality*, *location*, *identity*, and *historical memory* represent, instead

⁶ Chrisman contends, "rather than view anti-colonialism, organised struggle, and economic analysis as the polar opposites of black Atlanticism, we need to recognise more complexity in their relations; at times, I suggest, black Atlanticism and black nationalism are *interdependent*, not antithetical, practices" (2002: 1; my emphasis). *Roots en route* is a formulation that allows this interdependency.

of problems, complex, generative and transformative areas of analysis; is the question that this study answers. The place of southern African oral traditions and indigenous literary forms not as ahistorical or immutable, but as routed cultural archives that are not only produced and generated, but are productive and generative, destabilise Gilroy's solution. The African oral traditions resource base that shapes Kgositsile's corpus of work was published in black print cultures and periodicals, and by black diasporan publishing houses. This points to the collapse between *national* and transnational⁷, *location* and dislocation, and *Africa* and its diaspora. It also recalibrates *identity* as an ongoing production of collective memory, and *historical memory* not as static but entangled in the ongoing production of identity. Gilroy's focus on the ship as a site of origins for 'black Atlantic cultures' unfortunately does not leave space for *roots en route*.

"Roots en route" opens up space for national particularities, ethnicities and nation states whilst working within a post-essentialist framework. This allows the language issue that is central to Brent Edwards' argument in his *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (2003) to be considered and theorised without anxieties of immutable and moribund roots. Edwards argues that black internationalism cultures are "adversarial to themselves" since "it is not possible to take up the question of diaspora without taking account of the fact that the great majority of peoples of African descent do not speak or write in English" (Edwards, 2003: 7). As such he concludes with the assertion that "the cultures of black internationalism can be seen only in *translation*" (ibid; original emphasis). Here we start to give the question of language its due place in the discussions of the "counterculture of modernity"; a modernity which necessarily includes Africa (roots) in the grand narrative of its making.

This study therefore joins the criticism of *The Black Atlantic* based on its geopolitical limitations which "unduly constricted its truly rich horizons", as Ntongela Masilela argues: "by excluding Africa, Gilroy has in effect narrowed the Africanness or Africanity of the 'Black Atlantic'" (Masilela, 1996: 88). Or as Paul Zeleza points out, it would be "an oversimplification of the African American experience" to think of the middle passage as a starting point of that scope, hence urging us to "consider how Africa is positioned in that

⁷ Chrisman challenges Gilroy's view that "the political concerns of nationalism [are] fundamentally opposed by the transnationalist disposition of black Atlantic politics" (2002: 1) by arguing for an interdependent relations, as opposed to an antithetical one.

experience's memory, imagination and thought" (Zezeza, 2012). The forsaking of *roots* is seen by Goyal (2003) and Masilela as "deeply saddening" as it "expresses an unremitting disdainfulness for African, for things African, and for things that come from our 'Dark Continent'" (Masilela, 1996: 89). The repudiation of roots perpetuates the association of Africa with moribund traditions. Excluding Africa in the making of (black) modernity created some uneasiness about Kgositsile's pivotal presence in the discourses of black arts and black power movements, a feeling that he is both within those movements, as well as outside of them, compelling critics such as Mangharam to falsely insist on his liminality.

By focusing on the middle passage, Gilroy argues, "the ship is the first of the novel chronotopes presupposed by my attempts to rethink *modernity* via the history of the black Atlantic and the African diaspora into the western hemisphere" (1993: 17). Rethinking black modernity in the western hemisphere without a consideration of roots and Africa is to leave out that fundamental political philosophy on the twentieth century which postured a framework within which to read Kgositsile's role as political and cultural figure alongside black diasporans: pan-Africanism. In defence of Africa and roots, Masilela sees black diaspora intellectuals' search for historical meaning of Africa as the reasons for the likes of Richard Wright, W.E.B. Du Bois, C.L.R. James's wanderings in Europe; and the liberation of Africa as the preoccupations of Edward Blyden, Martin Delany, and Alexander Crummell in Africa. He argues that "this is the reason that they invented and constructed Pan-Africanism, arguably the most important political philosophy among black intellectuals in the 20th century. [...] Pan-Africanism, an invention by black diasporan intellectuals, whose object was the liberation of Africa, was par excellence the fundamental political philosophy of black modernity in the 20th century" (Masilela, 1996: 89).

As well as adopting black internationalism as a framework seen only in translation, this study also adopts Jaji's notion of the "stereomodern" (Jaji, 2014) which argues for pan-Africanism's ongoing and open theoretical potential. She offers a tool that frames discussions on "cultural practices that are both political and expressive, activated by black music and operative within the logic of pan-African solidarity" (Jaji, 2014: 14). Pan-Africanism transcends the limits of ethnicity and nation-state in the reading of Kgositsile's work, and also accommodates the *roots en route* approach, while situating his physical and revolutionary movements within a long tradition of fundamental political philosophies of black modernity in the twentieth century.

1.3 Methodologies and Chapter Outline

Since this study is concerned with poetry, the primary site of research is the literary analysis of Kgositsile's collections of poetry, namely *Spirits Unchained: Paeans* (1969), *For Melba* (1970), *My Name is Afrika* (1971), *The Word is Here: Poetry from Modern Africa* ([Ed.], 1973), *The Present is a Dangerous Place to Live* (1974), *Places and Bloodstains* (1975), , *Heartprints* (1980), *When the Clouds Clear* (1990), *To the Bitter End* (1995), *If I Could Sing* (2002), and *This Way I Salute You* (2004). He published the first six in the U.S. and they have made significant impact there, through winning coveted literary prizes, enabling collaborations in both literary and musical fields, and being featured in black internationalist periodicals. His rich poetry has led me to gather an eclectic group of theorist—from Walter Benjamin to physicist Karen Barad—as it functions on the nexus of history and nature, bringing together the arts and the sciences. Mazisi Kunene's ruminations on southern African literature and cosmologies have been helpful in reading Kgositsile's work. Kgositsile wrote critical papers which I also draw upon.

I also rely on the research method of interviews conducted with Kgositsile, his contemporaries and family members in both South Africa and the United States of America (U.S.A) in the period between 2013 and 2015. The following poets, literary critics, scholars, family members and historians were interviewed: A.B. Spellman, Quincy Troupe, Rashida Ismaili, Sam Anderson, Abiodun Oyewole, Amina Baraka, Sterling Plumpp, Muxe Nkondo, Mongane Serote, Ipeleng Kgositsile, Howard Dudley, and Evelyn Neal. The study also draws on archive material from institutions such as the National English Literary Museum in Grahamstown, South Africa; the Schomburg Centre for Research in Black Culture in New York; and The Bancroft Library of special collections at the University of California at Berkeley, where magazines, old newspapers, journals, and pamphlets provided some illuminating research materials used.

This dissertation is structured into two parts. The first part presents a literary biography which studies the relationship between his life and work, exploring the intersections between his literary and political commitments. As a writer whose work is informed by active cultural archaeology, studying his work requires mapping those influences and unearthing a black archive that was mostly formerly unrecorded. The project of excavating that societal, cultural

and political lineage necessarily poses challenges of the limited black archive, and has demanded the formation of one. The literary biography section therefore draws significantly on the interviews I have conducted with Kgositsile, some of his family members, and his contemporaries. It also draws on previously recorded interviews, as well as his critical work published in scholarly journals, magazines, newspapers, and websites.

The second part comprises three analytical chapters that investigate firstly, Kgositsile's strategic transformation of Tswana language and literature, and other southern African oral practices; secondly, the role of Setswana in forging pan-African solidarity and impacting both Afro-American literary and musical practices; and thirdly, Setswana's position in Kgositsile's coinage of concepts used to destabilise modernity's time, and to reconfigure space. Chapter Three shows how Kgositsile forges solidarity between Afro-American and South African liberation struggles by interweaving black South African indigenous resource base with Afro-American vernacular and artistic traditions. It propose a model that maps the strategic transformation of Setswana in his poetry, and focuses on how the African oral and literary traditions are simultaneously cultivated with Afro-American oral and literary traditions, as well as other black expressive cultures such as *mbaqanga*, blues and jazz, fostering continuity between those traditions.

Chapter Four explores the relationship between Kgositsile's work and Afro-American poetry-music outfit The Last Poets. It shows that Kgositsile's poem went on to create a resource base from which The Last Poets not only coined their name. It continues to map the trajectories of Kgositsile's poetry through his cultural heirs. With regards to those complex and dynamic musical relationships, Jaji's notion of the "stereomodern" (2014) becomes a useful heuristic for reading pan-African solidarity fostered through black music. Chapters Three and Four work in conjunction to show how roots are not left to ossify but carried over and renewed in translation, thereby impacting both the Afro-American literary and musical practices of the time.

Chapter Five is about time, and investigates Kgositsile's coined concepts 'coil of time', 'future memory', and 'NOW'. It shows how he draws from southern African oral traditions, mythologies and folklores mythify and reorder time and space. This relationship between him and his indigenous archive is in this chapter shown to operate on a subconscious level, what Harry Garuba calls the animist unconscious. The chapter reveals how a stream of collective

consciousness enables Kgositsile to function within a double location of time that subverts the binary between historicism and historical materialism.

Chapter Two: A Writing Life

A good biography “is the record of things that *change* rather than of the things that happen” (Woolf in Lee, 2005; my emphasis).

Studying the relationship between Keorapetse Kgositsile’s life and work, this chapter explores the intersections between his literary and political commitments. The paucity in archive material from the period known as ‘the silent decade’—the 1960s—and subsequent two decades necessarily beckons scholarly pursuits invested in mapping movements (peripatetic, as well as cultural and political), collaborations, exchanges, and publications that would ideally launch and contribute to the project of the black archive. Kgositsile’s poetry is characterised by active cultural archaeology through naming as a key feature, amongst others, which in turn demands researching the black archive and lineage, and where necessary, creating one. This chapter thus emphasizes the position of the collective consciousness in Kgositsile’s formation as a cultural and political figure, as well as continuity of cultural and political commitments at home and in the diaspora, in order to establish a general framework for the remainder of the dissertation.

The study of life and work brings to the fore three major themes that the later chapters will delve further into: the role of Setswana, jazz, and politics. They come to fore in a study that is attentive to the relations between life and work. Born in 1938, Kgositsile lived in extraordinary times marked by change and challenge, and his writing is in many aspects a record of and response to them. The formation of the South African Native National Congress (SANNC) in 1912; the Land Act of 1913; the rise of the ANC Youth League (1940s); the National Party’s legislated apartheid system in 1948; the defiance campaigns of the ANC, South African Communist Party (SACP), and the Pan African Congress (PAC) in 1950s; the anti-colonial liberation movements on the African continent; the civil rights movements in United States of America in the 1960s and 1970s; the Afro-Asian People’s Solidarity Movements (1950s –); the ANC’s exertion of pressure on the apartheid government from outside the border; the fall of the Berlin Wall; and the demise of apartheid in South Africa all come together to weave a complex narrative marked by a fissure between the personal and political. Kgositsile’s literary biography is undergirded by those vital cultural and political revolutions that steadily changed the course of history as well as the

social landscapes on this continent and his native South Africa. These events shaped his work, and his oeuvre in turn provides an illuminating response to them.

2.1 *Early Life in South Africa: 1938 – 1961*

Kgositsile was born on the 18th of February 1938, in a village called Dithakong, just outside of Mafikeng, in what was then the Transvaal, now North West province. That is an area where the Setswana language, historically the most widely distributed Bantu language in Southern Africa, was spoken. The South African Tswana speaking region and the country of Botswana, as James Moilwa recorded, are contiguous, separated only by a colonially constructed border (Moilwa, 1975: 1). Linguistically and culturally, they have a lot in common, and share similar oral history. Setswana is a member of the Sotho group of the Bantu languages: a Niger-Congo sub-branch of the family of African languages in Southern Africa. The Sotho group encompasses Setswana, Sesotho, and Sepedi languages and dialect clusters, and often Kgositsile draws from the wisdom of these languages interchangeably.

Discussing his names with Kalamu ya Salaam, he demystifies: “my first name is Keorapetse. Literally that translates to ‘we are blessed to have a son’. I was the first son in my family. The last name is Kgositsile. Historically it means ‘the king has arrived’. [...] In the various South African languages, on the whole continent really, every name has a very specific meaning. It’s not just John or Charles of something like that” (in Salaam, 1991). The understanding of names as indexical to familial narratives, and the practice of naming as conferring poetry onto the named is pivotal to understanding why almost every poem Kgositsile has penned is dedicated to cultural and political figures and/or movements.

The town of Mafikeng as an urban centre is historically important. In the mid-nineteenth century, the Molema section of the Barolong people settled on the back of Molopo River, “in small clustered villages which together formed an urban area [...] now colloquially known as ‘the Stadt’”—Dutch for ‘the city’ (Parnell, 1986: 204). Described as being “something other than an ordinary South African country town” by Susan Parnell, then-Mafeking was in 1895 selected as a town “to locate the British colonial administrative offices of the Bechuanaland Protectorate outside the colony” of Bechuana (now Botswana). That administrative “leased land from the Tswana chief, immediately adjacent to the Stadt. With the introduction of the Native Land Act in 1913, the situation changed radically” (ibid). This is detailed by Solomon

Plaatje in his *Native Life in South Africa* which details how “awaking on Friday morning, June 20, 1913, the South African Native found himself, not actually a slave, but a pariah in the land of his birth” (Plaatje, 2007: 21). Many were “forced into wage labour in the growing economic activity which centred in Mafeking in the early twentieth century” (Parnell, 2001: 204). The Dithakong which Kgositsile was born in emerged from the siege of Mafeking by the British, and in the wake of the Land Act, recuperating from dispossession and dislocation.

Growing up with his grandmother and mother, Kgositsile was not allowed to speak any English at home, and was furthermore encouraged to read in Setswana (Interview 1, 2013). His grandmother saw English as a tool to bludgeon and kill the cultures and languages of the natives, assimilating them into a particular type of thinking. She immediately identified it as “very dangerous”. Kgositsile narrates to Charles Rowell, in an interview conducted in 1973, that the early experiences that had an impact on his writing point to “two very strong women—my grandmother and my mother—in that order. Practically everything I write is tied up with some kind of wisdom I got from them in that hostile environment” (Rowell, 1978: 23). Kgositsile is keenly aware of the collective wisdom that can be possessed by the older generations. He emerges from a tradition of writers whose pressing task was to record the oral traditions shared with them by their grandmothers. This is true of Tswana writers Solomon Plaatje and Leepile Raditladi: Kgositsile’s predecessors who advertently sought and rejuvenated oral traditions in their work. Madikeledi, Kgositsile’s grandmother, represented a living oral archive. As he is quick to point out in our interview, for Madikeledi

there were several taboos: one of the major ones was what language I spoke at home. The worst condemnation I would feel from as early as I can remember was if I had blundered into an English phrase or word, and she would just look away, shaking her head and saying “heee, re setse re ena le makgowanyana mo”—or ‘we have some junior Europeans here’—and that would be the worst than any kind of punishment; that is why I call it condemnation instead of punishment. She encouraged me to read [...] in Setswana (Interview 4, 2014).

The “blundering into an English phrase” would have had as culprit the English primary state schools inherited from British colonial rule, where English was the medium of instruction, with an imposed English-centred curriculum used to extend the colonial project. Kgositsile reflects on this “imposition”,

There were a lot of things that did not particularly make sense that we could not readily relate to. If you came across some reference to snow in December, when where you live your life December is very, very hot; that felt like some imposition. Some of the idioms and proverbs; things like ‘those who live in glass houses should not throw stones’ [...] Where in the township would you even have one wall of glass? You didn’t have such non-sense like that. [...] I can remember one time an English teacher gave us an assignment to write something about Christmas. I wrote my little piece in terms of the way I knew how people celebrated Christmas in the township. He got very upset because I guess it didn’t mimic what some white boy of my age wrote about Christmas. That time in South Africa, where I grew up we didn’t have things like Christmas trees and people singing Christmas carols. So my little piece didn’t have any of those things. After he told me how bad it was, I gave it to another teacher who read the thing and told me this is a very good piece; it is ‘bad’ simply because he doesn’t want you to reflect this reality. He wants you to reflect another reality but didn’t have the guts to say we should write like little carbon copy white boys (Interview 2, 2013).

Kgositsile above mentions key factors in the ontological violence caused by colonial education: alienating a child from his environment, introducing him to a world external to his experience, and mystifying the language of his conceptualisation. This is what Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o calls “colonial alienation” (1986). In his *Decolonising the Mind*, Ngũgĩ reflects on what “the colonialist imposition of a foreign language [does] to us children” (Ngũgĩ, 1986: 16). Having attended British colonial schools around the same time—Ngũgĩ was also born in 1938—he identifies aspects of foreign language imposition: “the destruction or the deliberate undervaluing of a people’s culture, their art, dances, religions, history, geography, education, orature and literature, and the conscious elevation of the language of the coloniser. The domination of a people’s language by the languages of the colonising nations was crucial to the domination of the mental universe of the colonised” (ibid). Thus, Kgositsile’s teacher insisting on his misrepresenting his reality with a foreign language, thereby representing a world foreign to him, was a tool to alienate him from his people and even himself.

Kgositsile narrates the reinforcement of this alienation to Salaam, “going to school was a threat to try to dismiss the relevance of African languages and African culture. [...] if you were anywhere on the school grounds speaking a language other than English, you would be

very seriously punished” (in Salaam, 1991). This was a serious concern for Madikeledi, a concern also raised by Ngugi,

It was after the declaration of a state of emergency over Kenya in 1952 that all the schools run by patriotic nationalists were taken over by the colonial regime [...] English became the language of my formal education. In Kenya, English became more than a language: it was *the* language, and all the others had to bow before it in deference. Thus one of the most humiliating experiences was to be caught speaking Gĩkũyũ in the vicinity of the school. The culprit was given corporal punishment – three to five strokes of the cane on bare buttocks – or was made to carry a metal plate around the neck with inscription such as I AM A DONKEY (Ngugi, 1986: 11).

Ngugi laments how this imposition broke the *harmony* between the language of his education, that of his home, and immediate and wider community. The punishment meted out for speaking indigenous languages on the school grounds is not different from punishment endured by slaves on plantations caught in the act of African cultural practices, as Kalamu ya Salaam observes in his interview with Kgositsile; to which Kgositsile responds, “that’s not accidental. If you want to dehumanize a people, you get rid of their culture, first and foremost, and language carries culture” (in Salaam, 1991).

Mazisi Kunene shares a similar history: “my grandmother used to say when she forbade us to utter even the slightest word in English, ‘This language is responsible for the death of many of your ancestors’. What she desired to prohibit was not the English language per se, but all the values, institutions, ideologies, and attitudes that inevitably accompanied it” (Kunene, 1992: 32). Kunene and Kgositsile’s grandmothers were aware that adopting colonialism’s practices came at the cost of killing one’s ancestors, which would be an erasure of their history and heritage which underpins their identity. Madikeledi looked to the collective wisdom buried safely in the womb of oral traditions as “a form of education, an instrument of *social adjustment*, an expression of a sense of values, a historical record, a communicative strategy, a means of social control, a cultural index” (Molwa, 1975: 13; my emphasis). To ensure continuity with this social linkage, she instilled a reverence of the language to avoid the colonial alienation and fragmentation that would be caused by acculturation into the English language, culture and value system. Madikeledi’s consciousness of the collective wisdom enshrouded in orality and Tswana texts was a gift for Kgositsile to forge links

between the past and the present, satisfying his quest for identity as he continued to find meaning in life.

This stance is not only cultural but political. Madikeledi countered the death of Kgositsile's ancestors, and sought to mend the bridge between past and present by exposing him to praise poetry, riddles, proverbs, legends, myths, folk tales, naming, and songs, in order to ensure Kgositsile did not turn into a "junior European". She also encouraged him to read a wide range of literature, constantly ensuring that Setswana literature was in good supply. She understood, as Frantz Fanon diagnosed, that

To speak means to be in a position to use a certain syntax, to grasp the morphology of this or that language, but it means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization (1952: 17-18).

Civilization's weight threatened the erasure of 'other' histories—a form of violent (dis)figuration and what Chimamanda Adichie calls "a single story". Aware of this threat, Kgositsile's work would later strive to forge continuities between the epistemologies of his people and the literary traditions of black America. He explains to Rowell in 1973 that "the impact of someone like Baraka made or fertilized the ground, say in my mind, to be receptive immediately to people like Malcolm, Fanon, and others. What that did [...] was to open up in me memories of earlier wisdom during my young years in South Africa" (Rowell, 1978: 30). The wisdom of Fanon and Madikeledi are here brought into intimate proximity.

Madikeledi strategically guiding Kgositsile away from the colonial 'imposition' shaped how he "reacted in certain ways for the collective whole, away from that other mess", and by the time he started writing in junior high school, as he explains to Salaam; "because there is a very long tradition of storytelling and poetry, the oral tradition, it was not difficult. I think although most of the time I write in English, I think the way that I handled the English language was informed and shaped by the oral tradition" (Salaam, 1991). At a later stage when he came into full consciousness of the importance of this ethos, Kgositsile understood that a restoration of this continuity is what Chinua Achebe called "an act of atonement" (quoted in Awonoor, 1976, 251), a process of reconstituting a "shattered community, to save or restore the sense and fact of community against all the pressures of the colonial system"

(Davidson, 1978: 155), and restoring “the imprisoned community to itself” (Said, 1994: 259). Continuity thus becomes a leitmotif in Kgositsile’s work, for those purposes.

He recalls that the ‘colonisation of the mind’ that his English education sought to effect was reinforced through the demand that students memorise the syllabus: “when I was a young boy, even at primary school level, my stubbornness, my mind got made up consciously very early, that I would not memorise anything that I did not understand. So I was a headache to my English teachers. The English garbage, the English poetry we had to memorise, I flatly refused” (Interview 4, 2014). This act of “anti-memorising”, he explains, came from an awareness that “every time that we make a statement there are implications about memory, because essentially language at all times, whether directly or indirectly, refers to some kind of memory. Each word exists because of lived experience. [...] Language is that *archive*. And you use that archive now, all the time, in the present, to try and negotiate some kind of future” (Interview 2, 2013; my emphasis). His understanding of the archive of language is directly related to memory, not in a static sense postured by his colonial education, but as an ongoing unfolding and enfolding process. He recalls that starting in junior high school he used to write many stories he would share with friends outside the classroom, much to their enjoyment. He would later understand that his aesthetic

is an attempt at examining, exploring and expressing the collective, creative energies of South Africa, and those creative energies exist, and they would exist whether I was ever born or not. [...] In the same manner that the National Liberation Movement had to exist and work out its strategies and tactics in the interest of the *collective whole*, then, even without consciously thinking so, some of us reacted in certain ways for the *collective whole* away from that other mess (in Salaam, 1987: 3; my emphasis).

The generative and transformative nature of the “language archive” espoused by his grandmother and the collective whole revealed to Kgositsile the relationship between knowledge, discourse and power. The value system of what constitutes knowledge within the colonial project was exclusionary, so he sought to engage with the epistemological practices that came with colonialism as an attempt to recover African gnosis repressed by colonialism (Ogude on Ngugi, 1999: 1). This thread ties the thematic chapters of this dissertation together. As a conscious act of preserving culture, Kgositsile’s “writing is not just laying a claim to the terrain of culture, but also to radically ‘revised visions of the past tending

towards a postcolonial future, as urgently reinterpretable and redeployable experiences, in which the formerly silent native speaks and acts on territory reclaimed as part of a general movement of resistance, from the colonist” (Said in Ogude, 1999: 2). Thus Kgositsile challenges our notions of culture and national identities, tribal politics, and nation.

The struggle for land between British colonialists and South African Boers (Dutch settlers) culminated in the second Anglo-Boer between 1899 and 1902. The mounting tension between the two parties led to the Union of South Africa in 1910. The subsequent Natives Land Act of 1913⁸, which debilitated the livelihoods of native blacks, led to the formation of the South African Native National Congress (SANNC) in 1912. Later named the African National Congress (ANC) in 1923, the party was formed against the backdrop of mass deprivations of land ownership for Africans. The SANNC was co-founded by Solomon Plaatje (secretary-general), John Dube (president), and Pixley ka Isaka Seme (treasurer-general). The congress dealt with labour disputes for African workers mostly, and most importantly challenged the “iniquitous [Land] Act [...] aiming by despotic legislation to reduce the aboriginal inhabitants [...] to a condition of servility and helotage” (Limb, 2010: 126). By late 1920s, in the face of increasing urbanisation, there was “growing African proletarianisation”, and “many Africans [...] left their lands [to] go to the mines for employment” (Limb, 2010: 331). In the wake of the Great Depression, “the greatest significance during this period [that marked a turning point]”⁹ (Worden, 1994: 58), conditions of near famine followed between 1931 and 1933 that resulted in the ANC suffering internal fragmentation along ethnic lines.

In the 1940s, “a militant mood began to affect the African population. Massive numbers of Africans moved to industrial centres on the Witwatersrand [...] The militant mood prompted ANC to sharpen their own stance” (Meredith, 2005: 117-8), forging deeper bonds between the ANC and Communist party, and founding of the ANC Youth League in 1944. This had a

⁸ The Natives Land Act of 1913 “forbade the purchase or lease of land by Africans outside designated areas known as reserves. These were far removed from white-owned farms and the key areas of commercial agriculture. ... It removed the means by which many African producers had resisted both incorporation into the migrant labour system of the mines and wage labour on the farms” (Worden, 1994: 49).

⁹ The 1936 passing of the Native Trust and Land Act, ... provided addition of land to the reserves established by the 1913 Land Act. ... For most blacks the alternative to low-paid farm work or impoverishment in the reserves was to seek work in the towns (Worden, 1994: 60). These conditions of servitude destined for black people are the reasons for the influx of people moving to Johannesburg in the 1930s and 1940s. Kgositsile’s mother and father would be amongst these migrating people. He did not grow up with his father, who left Mafikeng to work in the city mines.

dramatic impact on the leadership of the ANC (Ballantine, 1993: 147). A group of young activists from the Youth League rejected ‘polite’ methods of political activity opted by their older predecessors, and demanded radical action (Meredith, 2005: 118). A new generation of activists took control and duly announced a ‘Programme of Action’ including civil disobedience, boycotts and ‘stay-at-home’ strikes on a mass scale (Meredith, 2005: 118-9). It is within the militant atmosphere of the ANCYL that Kgositsile would find a political home in the mid-1950s.

The growing dissent agitated by the ANCYL did not go unnoticed. The National Party won parliamentary elections in 1948 and institutionalized separate development policies called *apartheid* (separateness in Afrikaans) which reacted forcefully to the civil unrest and sonic atmosphere by enforcing totalitarian control over South Africa. The first order of business was to pass a plethora of laws to advance the project of separate development and white interest. Amongst the first laws was the Suppression of Communism Act in 1950, which responded to the Communist Party of South Africa’s influence on the African working class, inevitably impacting white monopoly capital negatively. This was shortly amended by the justice minister “to ban any person or organisation he viewed as ‘communist’, a broad definition which included almost all opposition to apartheid” (Worden, 1994: 97). The Influx Control regulations became a debilitating dispossession apparatus that sought to curb the movements of black people from rural areas to the big cities as a result of the booming economy. The Bantu Authorities Act of 1951 was thus passed to keep black people permanently from urban areas by setting up rural reserves known as homelands, where black people could reside on the basis of ethnicity. Black people were to reside in these rural homelands, granted independence with sovereign rule of chiefs, and required papers to travel across various tribal geographies, and further required a passbook called a *dompas*¹⁰ to travel to urban areas.

Back in Mafikeng Kgositsile’s grandmother died around 1949¹¹, so he had to live with relatives for a few months, before settling in with his uncle, Tholo, who was a teacher at Tshidi Barolong Secondary School, which Kgositsile also attended. They lived together at

¹⁰ Every black person from age sixteen had to carry a passbook called *dompas*, or “dumb pass”, which restricted their movements and kept them within their homelands.

¹¹ Kgositsile cannot remember the exact dates of this momentous event in his life, and remembers that the events around her death led to a most horrid stay with an aunt, which he chooses not to think or talk about: “I do not remember the year my grandmother died; perhaps I’ve erased it because it was after that that I went through the hell I mentioned” (email exchange, 27 October, 2014).

Tholo's house in Lomanyaneng, Mafikeng, and those years would leave lasting impressions in Kgotsitsile's life. This was the 'urban' Mafikeng, the extra-territory of Britain under Bechuanaland protectorate, and the capital of that protectorate, outside the jurisdiction of the apartheid government. Tholo, widely known as Bra Tholo, was a cultured man, and the prefix or title 'bra' before his name reveals this. The signifier 'Bra', as opposed to 'Mister' Tholo (as a school teacher) is an accolade that used to signify a hip, cosmopolitan, progressive, and politically conscious brother in society. It can be perused in jazz classics such as Abdullah Ibrahim's 'Bra Timing from Phomolong'. Tholo was a clarinet player and collector of jazz records: very rare and distinguished hobbies at that time, away from the metropolitan centres.

Uncle Tholo's house was also known for blaring the latest jazz records on the weekend, and hosting other friends with distinguished taste in music. In the late 1940s, and after World War Two, Bra Tholo discovered bebop through Sam Tshabanga¹²—a township jazz trumpeter and friend who had come into contact with American jazz pianist Horace Silver while playing for *mbaqanga*¹³ legendary group African Jazz Pioneers. Silver would send Tshabanga new records from Blue Notes¹⁴ upon release. Living in a house filled with jazz would shape Kgotsitsile's relationship to the art form, and he would later understand its development in black America and its development in South Africa from *marabi* to be "the most advanced cultural or artistic affirmation of our determination to live in spite of the conditions we were faced with" (Interview 4, 2014).

After living with Bra Tholo Kgotsitsile was sent to boarding school at Ohlange Institute in the first half of 1952, which was founded by John Dube in 1901, outside of Durban. Dube was a founding member and first president of the South African Native National Congress in 1912, later renamed ANC. Dube conceived the idea for the school when he returned to the United States of America in 1897 for further educational training. During that stay in the U.S. he was profoundly influenced by "Booker T. Washington, who had recently established his own college, Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute in Alabama" (Hughes, 2011: 43). In 1900, upon his return to South Africa, "in a rousing speech, John declared that [Inanda in Natal] was the chosen site for his visionary industrial school, his own Tuskegee" (ibid: 89). It would be "an all-African school, free of both mission and state oversight" (ibid). Dube named it

¹² Samuel Tshabanga is a trumpeter who was the youngest member of the African Jazz Pioneers.

¹³ A flavour of South African jazz, or as Kgotsitsile refers to it, "jazz with an African accent".

¹⁴ Blue Note Records is an American jazz record label founded in 1939 and is historically principally associated with hard bop style of jazz that mixes bebop with soul, rhythm and blues, gospel and blues.

Ohlange, deriving from *uhlanga*, “signifying the starting point of new growth, and hence the founder of a lineage or ‘stem’ of a family” (ibid: 93). It was “in complete accord with the sense of race pride, pan-Africanism and autonomy that Dube had begun to articulate so confidently in the United States” (ibid). The newly-formed apartheid regime and their encroaching oppressive acts incited mass student strikes at that school (as around the country). Kgositsile arrived in that heightened political climate and became active in those protests, leading to his expulsion half a year later.

He moved to Johannesburg in the second year of high school in 1952, arriving to a city that had been shaped by deep cultural, political, and economical shifts. In the 1930s, the decade Kgositsile was born, there had been a general increase in population in Johannesburg since the discovery of gold in the Witwatersrand basin at the end of the nineteenth century. The influx was attributed to large numbers of factories being established and growing in size post world war one, “following South Africa’s departure from the Gold Standard in 1933” (Brown, 1991: 63). The expansion of Johannesburg necessitated an influx of African labour. The outbreak of world war two brought on increasing levels of poverty in rural South Africa, which led to thousands of people heading to the city of Johannesburg. The Johannesburg City Council allotted land for freehold townships where the urban working poor lived. The townships were overcrowded inner city slumyards where Africans without permits could live. There a vibrant and virile subculture of jazz called *marabi* was born, fostered by the urbanised sectors of the working class.

Marabi was the music of the slumyard *shebeens* of the 1920s and 1930s and was to “inflect subsequent South African music in much the same way that its contentious status prefigures the reception and representation of later jazz” (Titlestad, 2004: 38). The performances and styles of the time reworked from the countryside to suit the urban landscapes reflected “a *petit-bourgeois* outlook and practice of the African National Congress for much of the period between the 1920s and the early 1940s. For workers and slum-dwellers, this was a time of relative passivity, the result, it is usually held, of the failure of the ANC to create in the black communities a viable organisational presence which would link up with the lives and struggles of the urban working class” (Ballantine, 1991: 130). *Marabi* was more than a musical style; “the weekend-long celebrations held to its accompaniment were working-class accommodations to poverty and unemployment that grew out of the *stokvels* (an institution of economic co-operation and self-help)” (Titlestad, 2004: 39). The culture and economy of the

illegal slumyard liquor dens, characterised by “illegal liquor sales and prostitution, provided a livelihood for a significant number of people [...] However, in black communities divided across class lines [...] *marabi* then summoned up [...] moral outrage and fears of social pathology” (Titlestad, 2004: 39). *Marabi* had become associated with mindless festivities of the poor working class devoid of any political consciousness.

Marabi, as Christopher Ballantine (1991) tells us, contained musical performances and styles that developed in the South African country side and more recently in the towns. The role of those performances and styles in society are often to be found in the discourses that surround it. Within that subculture, there were those musicians who adopted the liberal view that attempted to use “moral persuasion” to present a moral claim to their masters. Likely, there was a marked shift in musicians who repudiated the morality of missionary-schooled elites and espoused Africanism as an aesthetic. In the mid-1930s *Bantu World* (February, 1935) reported that shift in the headline, “Africans Must Not Ape Europeans”, and part of the article read, “I am going back to my people in the sense that for the rest of my life I am going to think and feel as an African—not as a white man” (Ballantine, 1991: 147). This shift to Africanism by urban blacks was sought out both culturally and politically, and coincided with the formation of the ANCYL in the early 1940s. The political developments fed and continued to feed the cultural ones, and vice versa, against the background of black struggle. The marriage between the two thrives between the pages of Kgositsile’s poetry.

Kgositsile moved to Western Native Township—one of the freehold townships designed to house the African working class—in 1952 where he was finally in close proximity with his mother, who worked as a cleaner for a white family in Yeoville, Johannesburg. He started his first year of high school in the middle, in that township’s Madibane High School. Being ‘reared’ by a rural British colonial school then situated in a politically active black school of excellence at Ohlange prepared Kgositsile made his mind a fertile ground for political activity as well as the pace of urban socio-political life. In 1953 the apartheid regime “imposed a uniform curriculum which stressed separate ‘Bantu’ culture and deliberately prepared students for little more than manual labour” (Worden, 1994: 96) through inferior education passed as The Bantu Education Act. Authored by Hedrick Verwoerd, “a Dutch-born ideological fanatic with ambitions to put apartheid into practice on a scale never previously imagined” (Meredith, 2005: 120), commented that the “previous educator of Africans ‘misled them by showing them the green pastures of European society in which they

are not allowed to graze” (Christie and Collins, 1984: 173). Kgositsile adds, “the white government get Europeans to write the textbooks [so] they can include all the blatant propaganda they want to” (in Rowell, 1978: 25). Students were vehemently opposed to receiving inferior propagandist education, turning apartheid schools into sites of political dissent as well as surveillance by the regime, ‘safeguarding’ against those politically-motivated teachers and students alike.

These developments were akin to rites of passage for Kgositsile, whose repudiation of curricula shaped by English culture and now institutionalised Afrikaans culture, found him seeking alternative literature. He was in luck, for his high school education would offer continuity for his mother tongue’s political values. Setswana author Daniel Philip Semakaleng Monyaise taught him Setswana and Afrikaans literature and language in Form IV and V at Madibane High School, Western Native Township, Johannesburg (Kgositsile, 1991: 6). Monyaise’s works are considered a milestone in the Setswana novel tradition. His novels “constitute a quantitative leap in the development of the Tswana novel” (Molwa, 1981: 62). According to Molwa, “in quality his novels are miles away from those of his predecessors [...] His level has not yet been surpassed [...] He is a colossus that bestrides the tradition of the Tswana novel” (ibid). Kgositsile’s coming of age politically and culturally was therefore under the tutelage of one of the best authors of Tswana literature. If Madikeledi sowed the oral component of the Tswana language, then Monyaise tended to the seedling and made it possible for Kgositsile to start thinking about the written component of that language, and the possible continuities between the two.

When poet Lesego Rampolokeng interviewed him for the *Sunday Independent*, Kgositsile explained his reverence for his teacher’s command of the Tswana language: “writing [...] came out of a love of language play. DPS Monyaise taught me at Madibane High. His use of Setswana, just in his speech, was extraordinary. When we later learned that he had been writing poetry for years it was not surprising” (*Sunday Independent*, 15 April 2007). Monyaise left an indelible mark on Kgositsile’s relationship with the language of his birth. Upon return to South Africa after 29 years in exile, when he is asked, during their drive from the airport, “how good is your Setswana” (1991: 5), he answers that his Setswana is “dangerously good. *Setswana A, saga Monyaise*” (ibid). This means his Setswana fetches an A, if it were to be examined; it is as good as that of Monyaise. Kgositsile here posits Monyaise as the benchmark of good Setswana, and also claims to match it. The concern of

the English language not killing one's ancestors finds articulation here. Kgositsile explains in the article, "you know, in my opinion, old man Monyaise is one of our best living novelists. But because he writes in Setswana he is not known outside of a bit of South Africa and Botswana" (ibid: 5-6). He speaks with indebtedness to his influence: "soon I will translate his work. I owe it to him" (ibid).

Johannesburg of 1952 marked the beginning of ANC's mounting 'Defiance Campaigns', which protested against the growing totalitarianism of apartheid. Responding to apartheid government's attack on black South Africans' rights and livelihood, the ANC and the South African Indian Congress launched defiance campaigns, "a programme of action 'for a campaign of civil disobedience and a general strike' against the pass laws, stock limitation in the Reserves, the threat to 'remove black spots', and the whittling down of franchise rights" (Hirson, 1988: 78). These strikes were carried out in mid-1952, and saw just over 8 000 people imprisoned for breaking selected apartheid laws. They were charged with promoting communism under the Suppression of Communism Act. These decisive acts captured the popular imagination and ANC membership grew dramatically from 7 000 to 100 000 (Worden, 1994: 100). These acts of defiance led to the popular treason trial of 1956 where, in a raid, 156 congress leaders were arrested and charged with high treason. The trial lasted until 1961, and none of the accused were found guilty. Through the campaign the ANC attained a mass appeal it had not previously enjoyed.

Johannesburg was also growing in size, due to urbanization marked by unprecedented relocations from rural South Africa to its cities. These movements were met with increasing apartheid legislation designed to "re-tribalize" urban Africans. Alan Paton captures the mood of flux in his landmark 'Jim comes to Jo'burg'¹⁵ novel that was adapted into a movie *Cry, the Beloved Country*: "everyone is coming to Johannesburg. From the Transkei and the Free State, from Zululand and Sekukuniland, Zulus and Swazis, Shangaans and Bavenda, Bapedi and Basuto, Xhosas and Tembus, Pondos and Fingos, they are all coming to Johannesburg" (Paton, 1948). These previously marginalised folks (subject to poll and hut taxes—amounts which were accepted only in coins, hence pushing the natives to seek work) in search of economic freedom arrived in Johannesburg to the freehold townships which were in the inner city. Apartheid's influx control regulations legislated the pass law, which required all black

¹⁵ Jim comes to Jo'burg' became somewhat of a genre of art that captured the movements from rural to urban areas by blacks.

males to register for pass books—permits that had to be carried at all times, also known as *dompas*—to be produced at the request of apartheid officials at any given time.

The government sought to “re-tribalize” this influx of natives into the city by separating them along ethnic lines. Propagandist material for those purposes was instigated through a magazine such as *The African Drum*, which was meant to depict Black South Africans as ‘noble savages’ as a way to manage the ‘Bantu’. Paton’s novel has been seen to feed into that narrative through its representation of the “moral degeneration of urban life against the pristine promise of the rural realm”, articulating “apartheid policies to come, which consigned Africans to ‘tribal homelands’ in order to produce South African city-space as white” (Samuelson, 2008: 64). The content of the magazine “consisted mainly of tribal preaching and folk tales, and despite a readership of about 20 000, the magazine was not financially successful” (ibid). The urban Africans refused these re-tribalizing efforts. In his *Drum: The Making of a Magazine*, *Drum* co-founder Anthony Sampson records the protest from one reader, “ag, why do you dish out that stuff, man? [...] Tribal music! Tribal history! Chiefs! We don’t care about chiefs! Give us jazz and film stars, man! We want Duke Ellington, Satchmo [Louis Armstrong] and hot dames! Yes, brother, anything American. You can cut out this junk about kraals and folk tales and Basutos in blankets—forget it! You’re just trying to keep us backward, that’s what! Tell us what’s happening right here, on the Reef”¹⁶ (Sampson, 2005: 20).

By early 1952, “under the advice of black readers [...] the magazine was transformed into a thoroughly urban production [...] into a spirited amalgam of essays, columns and photographs on politics, boxing and ball sports, crime, gangs and jazz, models and housewives, and a monthly short story of two that brought into its pages virtually all the black writers of note” (Driver, 2012: 394). The hunger for Duke Ellington and Satchmo was sated. Rob Nixon argues that “the modern urban individual depicted *Drum* is informed” by a range of textualities, including reading from “the Harlem Renaissance, which helped the *Drum* writers to present themselves as ‘iconoclastic, independent, and ineradicably cosmopolitan” (Driver, 2014: 397). The magazine became, a “textual space in and through which black South Africans wrote themselves into the city, asserting a restless belonging in defiance of apartheid’s efforts to writer them out of urban existence and fix them instead in ossified

¹⁶ The reef refers to the area called the Gold Reef, where much of the gold mines were located.

traditions” (Samuelson, 2008: 65-66). Michael Chapman adds, “*Drum* in the 1950s was a symbol of the new African who, in opposition to apartheid, asserted a city identity” (Chapman, 1989: Preface). The amalgamation of black writers of note would later become a hub of great influence on the budding of Kgositsile as a writer.

Lewis Nkosi famously christened 1950s Johannesburg the “fabulous decade” (1983), and Kgositsile was favourably situated at the heart of it. Sophiatown became a haven of cultural production, with *Drum* as a platform for this outpouring. It “had been the site of a burgeoning black urban culture centred around *Drum* magazine” (Samuelson, 2008: 63). Kgositsile arrived to this Johannesburg in the early years of the fabulous decade, in which pennywhistles and *kwela* music were resounding, the upbeat sound of that instrument popularised through appearing in the landmark South African film *The Magic Garden* (1951), also known as *The Pennywhistle Blues*¹⁷. It was also the Johannesburg of the movie *African Jim* (1949), also called *Jim comes to Jo 'burg*, starring South African *mbaqanga* songstress Dolly Rathebe. In his poetry Kgositsile often emphasizes the continuum of sound from *marabi* to *mbaqanga* and jazz, to *kwela*, and credits these movements as ‘midwives’ who gave birth to “our sound”. These images of birth are resonant in Todd Matshikiza’s recollection of the emergence of *mbaqanga*:

African Jazz was reborn. The original product—*Marabi*—had died when American swing took over. [...] We syncopated and displaced accents and gave endless variety to our ‘native’ rhythms. We were longing for the days of the *Marabi* piano, vital and live. Blues piano, ragtime piano, jazz band piano, swing and modern piano had taken it away from us. And here we were seedling it again with new blood in its veins (Matshikiza in Ballantine, 1993: 61-62).

The African Jazz Pioneers played *mbaqanga*, which was a musical instantiation of the broader social, political and cultural changes that characterised the 1940s, and aligned with the emergent politics of New Africanism whose nationalist strain culminated in the formation of the ANC Youth League in 1944 (Ballantine, 1991: 145). In the mid-1940s, some musicians had come in contact with, and performed with, American artists during World War

¹⁷ <http://www.allmusic.com/artist/willard-cele-mn0001215054/biography>

Two. The “midwives”¹⁸ of *mbaqanga* were musicians such as Ntemi Piliso and his African Jazz Pioneers, and Gwigwi Mrwebi. In his poem to Mrwebi of the Jazz Maniacs and Harlem Swingsters, Kgositsile writes, “ok you insistent bugger ... / come come come come then I want to see / the back of the moon anyway” (1975: 12), making reference to ‘back of the moon’, a jazz paradise he used to frequent in the heyday of Sophiatown where a number of leading jazz musicians lived, and where *mbaqanga* was enjoyed in the late 1940s and 1950s. For Kgositsile, the “lyrics of *mbaqanga* as popular music then were socially relevant”. They were not only socially relevant but were cosmopolitan, birthing a new politically-conscious African modernity that would converge with Afro-American music. Kgositsile recalls

[The] generation of people like the late Ntemi Piliso, during world war two, came in contact with African American musicians. They managed to play together. There were mutual influences. For instance today when we talk about South African jazz essentially what we mean I think is jazz with a South African accent (Interview 2, 2013).

Mbaqanga, or “jazz with a South African accent”, as Kgositsile calls it, was the kind of music that Bra Tholo listened to when Kgositsile lived with him those brief but important two years. Their indulgence in jazz functioned to assert an acoustic regime within apartheid’s limiting parameters. David Coplan observes that “African jazz was a music of cosmopolitanism and not ‘tribalism’” (Coplan, 2007: 197). Inasmuch as the apartheid government was determined to have black South Africans live an insular life marked by tribalism, jazz instituted a cosmopolitan and transnational outlook; what Titlestad (2004) refers to as ‘tactical modes of survival under apartheid surveillance’. The significance of music on a national level at that time, as Kgositsile reflects, was firstly that of affirmation; and he paraphrases Es’kia Mphahlele’s observation that, “it was like finally after the day is done where you have been under the boot of the oppressor, that you still could affirm your humanity” (Interview 2, 2013). The saturation of music energised the masses to overcome the living and working conditions of Africans in Johannesburg and the general Witwatersrand region.

¹⁸ In his ‘Bra Ntemi’ Kgositsile asks the rhetorical question, “who would have been Mbaqanga’s midwives”, and alludes to both *marabi* and Bra Ntemi Piliso as giving “rebirth to our sound” (1995: 32).

In our interview Kgositsile recalls that he and his friends used to follow groups such as African Jazz Pioneers “almost every weekend where they played” (Interview 3, 2013). One of his friends “in high school [was] Jonas Gwangwa, the master trombonist, we used to sit side by side” (Interview 5, 2014). Together with other friends they moved from township to township listening to artist such as Ntemi Piliso, Dollar Brand, Miriam Makeba, Dolly Rathebe, Dorothy Masuka, Abigail Kubeka, Stompie Manana, and the Huddleston Jazz Band (of which Hugh Masekela and Gwangwa were members). He adds, “on occasions like New Years’ celebrations, we’d leave the township, go to place like Haartebeespoort¹⁹, every year, and there would be plenty of music and celebrating. We were always surrounded by music” (Interview 2, 2013). Kgositsile emphasizes that in spite of the conditions under which African musicians worked, they were still very productive and produced a lot of music” (ibid). Black modernity in Johannesburg was then in swing, informed by a multiplicity of cultural contexts, including jazz and literatures of the Harlem Renaissance.

It was around late high school years when a seaman from the U.S. docked his ship at the Cape Town harbour and found acquaintance with a local with whom he shared Richard Wright’s *Black Boy*. This copy of Wright’s autobiography “travelled all over the country among those of us who were interested in writing”, and “when it got to me, it was then that I realised I didn’t have to have European models to write” (in Rowell, 1978: 28)²⁰. It was this realisation that inspired Kgositsile to spend time in the library of the United States Information Service Office (USIO), “trying to find black literary models” (ibid). The library project had been set up by the U.S. through the philanthropic interests of the Carnegie Foundation in the 1920s and 1930s “in the U.S., United Kingdom, and the British dominions and colonies” (Rochester, 1999: 27-28). In South Africa, they wished to open libraries that also serviced blacks, as “libraries existed [...] from the eighteenth century, serving the white population, in their two languages, English and Afrikaans (ibid: 29). It was initially conceived as a library drive to “promote healthy use of leisure time and preventing fighting

¹⁹ Haartebeespoort is a resort in the North West province, what used to be the Transvaal, where black people were permitted to host events and picnics.

²⁰ Andries van der Vlies coins the phrase “*textual Atlantic*” to account for “South African-American-European identification” through print cultures, whose traffic ensures that such transactions as detailed by Kgositsile “are played out most materially” (Van der Vlies, 2007: 51). He adds, “attending to text and print cultures in the textual Atlantic, to the material fates of texts in print and in constant physical and metaphorical movement, allows us to cast light on the processes by which writing from South Africa and the United States circulates and is transformed in transnational spaces of exchange and appropriation” (ibid: 53).

and drunkenness” for “non-Europeans” of South Africa²¹ (ibid). These efforts also led to the founding of the famed Bantu Men’s Social Centre in 1942.

Kgositsile remembers that in that USIO library “they had most of Langston Hughes’s work. [...] Those of us who were trying to find black literary models spent a lot of time in that library” (in Rowell, 1978: 28). Hughes’s and Wright’s work would have a lasting impact on Kgositsile’s development as a writer²². He asserted in our interview, “I think outside of the Setswana texts, the classics, that book [*Black Boy*], let me say in terms of books written in English, was the first text that had such an impact on me that I consciously realised that you don’t have to sound like some carbon copy white boy if you wrote in English, that you can tame it to be your language, you can tame it to express who you are. It was Richard Wright who opened that door and reinforced that determination on my part” (Interview 4, 2014). Kgositsile was also made aware, through Wright’s autobiography, that there was a “connection or closeness of black people here [in America] and black people in South Africa” (Rowell, 1978: 28). As such, he experienced “Africa in America” before he travelled to America.

Against this cultural backdrop would emerge protest songs and work songs as political and cultural signifier to lived experience of African people in the area of the Witwatersrand, or Johannesburg. Communist Party member and poet Jeremy Cronin recalls that the songs at ANC or COSATU rallies “are old warrior songs, church songs, which had previously been old ritualistic songs transmuted into Christianity, then into protest songs, then into worker songs, and so on”²³. That is the continuity that Kgositsile refers to: the transmutation of practices that have historically expressed without compromise the total humanity of African people²⁴. He also notes that music during that time was like “an unconscious act of resistance

²¹ Perceived by some critics to have been strategically situated to assimilate and create native informers out of blacks, Stéphane Robolin argues that designs cannot dictate outcomes, if these libraries and centres were designed to temper collective action, “they nevertheless offered curious black readers transformative first encounters with African American writing that would shape their world views and writing” (Robolin, 2012: 87).

²² Another South African writer, Peter Abrahams, recalls the impact W.E.B Du Bois’ *The Soul of Black Folks* (1903) had on him when he first encountered it in the Bantu Men’s Social Centre library. He read it and wrote in his own autobiography *Tell Freedom* (1954) that “for all the thousand miles, for all the ocean, between the land and people of whom he wrote and my land, Du Bois might have been writing about my land and people. The mood and feeling he described was native to me. I recognized the people as those among whom I lived. ... Du Bois had given me a key to the understanding of my world. The Negro is not free...” (Abrahams, 1954: 193-4).

²³ <http://webpages.dcu.ie/~sheehan/za/cronin02.htm>

²⁴ Kgositsile explained in our interview, “the significance of music in our lives, at the artistic level, was like the most advanced cultural or artistic affirmation of our determination to live in spite of the conditions we were faced with” (interview 3, 2014).

[...] By listening you became a participant in the unfolding and expression of that level of depth of feeling. And also in terms of song, the lyrics addressed urgent social issues, for example bus boycotts, forced removals, and so on” (ibid). The culture of resistance and the political developments fed into one another.

It was within this cultural and political matrix that Kgositsile joined the ANC. He proclaims that without culture and the arts, chances are there would not even have been a political organisation; that “the ANC as a liberation movement at best was an organised political expression of a cultural alternative to the culture of apartheid/colonialism” (Interview 5, 2014). He views the ANC as a counterculture of modernity’s colonialism and apartheid. He maintains that there was no particular year he can point out as being the year he joined that party as

those days the ANC was everywhere. If you were a member of some club or a debating society, or whatever you can think of, chances were the leadership of whatever group it was, was probably ANC. So for some of us I think the best you could say is at some point you realised that you were a member even before you consciously thought about it. And when you look back and realise that the people you spend a lot of time with, the things you did were all part of the work of the ANC (Interview 5, 2014).

He recalls that in 1958 when ANC chairperson of the Alexandra branch Alfred Nzo was detained at the Modderbee Prison for not carrying a resident permit (which was revoked when he lost his job as a health inspector due to his political activities), Kgositsile became the messenger from between ANC leadership and Nzo in prison. Alexandra, fourteen kilometres out of Johannesburg, “like Kliptown and Sophiatown Townships, was a black freehold community where Africans could own property. It was also a political haven for radical activist leaders like Dr. A.B. Xuma, Walter Sisulu, Ida Mtwana, Lillian Ngoyi, Oliver Tambo, Albert Luthuli, and Nelson Mandela—all African National Congress stalwarts²⁵—who honed their organizational and oratorical skills at Number Three Square in Alexandra”, explains Hugh Masekela in his biography (Masekela & Cheers, 2004: 38). Kgositsile recalls his journeys to the prison, “I would just go there and tell them I was looking for my brother

²⁵ Xuma was the president of the ANC from 1940 to 1949; Sisulu, Tambo and Mandela were elected to the executive committee of the newly established ANC Youth League in 1944; Ngoyi was a member of the Garment Workers Union, and joined the ANC during the 1950 Defiance Campaigns; Mtwana was the first president of the ANC Women’s League; and Luthuli was president-general of the ANC from 1952 to 1967.

that I think got arrested, and they asked me what his name was, and I would say “that guy was so much of a *tsotsi* [hoodlum or thug] that he could be using any name, the best thing would be for me to go in and look. And they would let me in. Mission accomplished. And it wasn’t once, but they never even realised, because to them all natives looked alike” (Interview 5, 2014). It was a “terrifying feat” (ibid) for a twenty year old, and that provided passage for him into a political career. Through commitment to the ANC, Kgositsile earned his stripes and fast gained ranks in the liberation movement, becoming a core member.

After high school, around 1955, he started working in positions considered ‘appropriate’ for black South Africans. The yardstick for appropriateness was informed by the Bantu Education law which propagated black subservience to whites. Kgositsile explains to Rowell, “after high school, I tried to work for a while. It lasted about five months. Within those five months, I had tried all kinds of different jobs. For example, I was a dispatch clerk in a radio and TV distribution firm. I worked as a packer in a paper factory as what they call a delivery boy (Kgositsile in Rowell, 1978: 27). He decided to quit, that he was “never ever going to work for anyone in South Africa again” (ibid). A few days after that a teacher that had joined the English faculty in his last years of school heard of his decision to never work for a white person again. He paid him a visit,

I think he found out through my cousin [who was teaching at the same school] that I was never going to work again. He knew me well enough to know that if I had made the decision it was final. So, one night he came by my home and suggested to me that maybe I should think about writing since he thought I had a bit of a talent. I took his advice, and after that for about seven or eight months I spent eighteen hours a day working. All I did was read, write, and eat. I didn’t even have regular sleeping hours. I worked around the clock (ibid).

In 1956 Kgositsile’s rigorous training in reading and writing paid off when he started freelancing as a journalist for *The Guardian*, which was the “mother paper” for what would re-surface after the Treason Trial as *New Age*, a communist party weekly paper. He found a “mentor” in Alex La Guma—“it was through the writing that he became my mentor” (Interview 5, 2014). He also recalls that “on a daily basis we were interacting with people like

[*Drum* writers] Can Themba, Casey Motsisi²⁶, Stan Motjuwadi²⁷ and so on; people who were not writing like they were carbon copy English writers. When you read a piece by Can Themba it is steeped in the experience of the township through and through. Therefore even its rhythms, its nuances, and points of reference, you might say, practically make his expression in English native to South Africa” (ibid: 11-12). In his short story ‘Baby Come Duze’, Themba writes, “there’s a New Lingo in the Townships, Bright as the Bright-Boys, made of Afrikaans, Zulu, Sotho, English and Brand-New Words” (*Drum*, April, 1956: 109). Nkosi wrote of Themba’s short stories, “he eschewed the turgid, the solemn and the pretentiously weighty language of those who merely wish to sound abstruse. He lent to his thoughts the same vivid imagery, sharp staccato rhythm of the township language of the urban *tsotsi*, because he himself was the supreme intellectual *tsotsi* of them all” (Themba, 1972: x)²⁸. Themba was most appealing to Kgositsile, and the former’s writing made the latter realise that “[his] poetic reference are not English in spite of the language [he] use”; which meant he would also have to make his English native to South Africa.

Es’kia Mphahlele’s essay credits the *Drum* decade as ‘Landmarks in Black Writing’, “these South African writers are fashioning an urban literature on terms that are unacceptable to the white ruling class. They are detribalised [...] they keep on digging their feet into an urban culture of their own making” (Mphahlele, 1974). As a key figure in the literary struggle for the right to the city, Themba’s rejection of the country and its indigenous languages and writing in a new lingo of the townships became an act of protesting against apartheid’s re-tribalizing project. Being steeped in the Setswana cultural archive and gnosis, Kgositsile also rejected the country and its tribalism, but was still committed to the continuities between his cultural background and the emerging urban identity. He would later forge these continuities in his work across the Atlantic.

In his poetry Kgositsile refers to Themba as an institution because during his time as an apprentice journalist he also spent time at Themba’s ‘house of truth’, as his house in Sophiatown was dubbed. Kgositsile describes the mood of the house of truth as thus:

²⁶ *Drum* journalist and short story writer known for his humorous reportage of black urban life.

²⁷ *Drum* permanent staff and poet.

²⁸ Introduction to *The Will to Die*, short stories by Can Themba.

it was almost like a little island of bohemia where anything could happen, especially anything that defied apartheid laws. Anything illegal but not criminal. Not criminal according to the moral integrity of the people of the township. In other words, although Africans were not supposed to drink bottled liquor, that's what they drank in the 'house of truth'. Although Africans were not supposed to read any banned literature and so on, chances were at the 'house of truth' you would find a number of banned texts. Africans were not supposed to interact with whites as equals, chances were you would find whites interacting with African as equals at the 'house of truth' (Interview 4 2014).

Inspired by the atmosphere of outright dissent, and political reportage of publications such as *Drum*, *The Golden Post*, and *The Guardian* Kgositsile aligned himself with political writing to respond to the reality of his time. In order to contextualise the work of *The Guardian/New Age* within the politics of the fifties, Kgositsile states that “all of the editors—Ruth First in Johannesburg, Brian Bunting in Cape Town, Govan Mbeki in the Eastern Cape, M.P Naicker in Durban—were all part of the Treason Trial²⁹. So they were not just writers or journalists, they were also political activists” (Interview 4, 2014). The fifties was a zeitgeist whose radical change was driven by politics in tandem with culture. Kgositsile muses that *mbaqanga* “addressed bus boycotts, defiance campaigns, stay-aways, the changing of the currency, anything that involved people collectively” (ibid). He refers to the mobilization of blacks against the ruling class policy of oppression, including the bus boycotts, which started in 1949 and continued throughout the 1950s in earnest; “first the beginning of the boycotts were in Alexandra Township [...] simultaneously, Sophiatown and Western Native Township joined the boycott, and Lady Selborne in Pretoria. Eastwood joined in, and Germiston and Edenvale” (First, in *Africa South*, 1957: 56). Through the 1957 Alexandra protests against the Public Utility Transport Corporations (PUTCO),

The people have held out in the face of police intimidation, of threats from their employees, of terrific deprivation and suffering to themselves. But it is possible for

²⁹ In 1955 the ANC in conjunction with Indian activists and a group of radical whites, many secret members of the underground communist party, drew up a 'Freedom Charter' which demanded the right of all citizens to vote, hold office and to be equal before the law. The economic clauses of the Charter advocated nationalisation of the mines, land and banks. Mandela denied it was a blueprint to a socialist state, and declared “it is a revolutionary document precisely because the changes it envisages cannot be won without breaking up the economic and political set-up of present South Africa”. The apartheid government thought so too, and in 1956 arrested 156 activists including all senior ANC leaders, and all the editors of *The Guardian* mentioned. They charged them with high treason.

them to do so NOW that they have a weapon which the ruling class cannot break so easily. ... [Minister of Transport] Schoeman has correctly seen it as a trial of strength ... they realise that for once they are not dealing with people drugged with Non-Violence [led by Albert Luthuli] or under the heavy opiate of martyrdom. But with people who realise and feel their strength in the united action of a people. ... In the boycott they see their strength and are finding themselves. That is why under the flimsiest of pretexts even the army has been called in order to protect the buses³⁰!

These mass mobilisations informed the ‘stay-aways’ which meant that black people were not showing up at their place of work, challenging their unfair disempowering labour practices and impacting the economy. It resembled the revolution of the working classes that would halt capitalist modes of production. The people had “found their true weapon of struggle. ... For out of Alexandra Township has emerged the weapon whereby the oppressed can fight, and fight successfully, not only fare increases – but also against Bantu Authorities, Urban Areas, Pass Laws [...] for full democratic rights for the whole nation of South Africa” (ibid: 2). Through their slogan “Azikhwela (‘We Shall not Ride’)”, they devised, as Ruth First reported, a “terse, succinct, ‘magic’ catchword that epitomizes a whole legion of African demands, a concept of struggle, an entire campaign” (First, in *Africa South*, 1957: 55). *Mbaqanga* carried political messages and became a mouthpiece for the collective aspirations of the people. For example pennywhistle composer Spokes Mashiane’s song ‘Azikhwela’ became a hit boycott song, and was “banned by the S.A. Broadcasting Corporation. [...] The boycott not only held the headlines, it pre-occupied Cabinet Ministers, industrialists, municipal councils and political parties” (ibid: 56). It was a positively turbulent period for blacks.

Politically things reached fever pitch. Some ANC members such as Nelson Mandela who had previously aligned themselves to the Africanist wing within the ANC were now fully committed to a multiracial society as stipulated in the Freedom Charter: South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white (Meredith, 2005: 121). In 1959 the Africanists against multiracialism broke away from the ANC to form the Pan-African Congress (PAC) demanding “government of the Africans, by the Africans, for the Africans, and promising militant action to achieve it” (Meredith, 2005: 122). They announced a campaign of mass

³⁰ Issued by Society of Young Africans, as documented on South African History Online <http://www.sahistory.org.za/archive/alexandra-bus-boycott-1957>

protest against the hated pass law system. Thousands went to prison weekly for failing to produce a 'pass' on demand. On 21 March 1960 in Sharpeville, the recently formed radical Pan-African Congress (PAC) led by Robert Sobukwe waged an anti-pass protest. They were met by police who opened fire indiscriminately on a mass of protesters, killing 69 and wounding 186 (ibid). The Sharpeville massacre became a symbol of the brutality of the apartheid system. Hendrik Verwoerd, the second president of apartheid South Africa, ordered a massive crackdown. Using emergency powers, the government banned the ANC and the PAC and detained thousands of anti-apartheid dissidents (ibid). The ANC responded to the crackdown by ordering some of its members, including Kgositsile, to leave the country.

Kgositsile recalls that a certain British journalist who lived in Tanganyika and was visiting South Africa arrived at the *New Age* offices one Friday evening, and announced to Kgositsile that he had been listening to the radio, and heard Verwoerd claiming that Julius Nyerere was threatening to kick all the whites out of the would-be independent Tanganyika (Interview 4, 2014). This was Verwoerd's propaganda to dissuade any white South Africans who sympathised with black oppression, as well as white liberals: a mild threat to the white minority of South Africa to be steadfast in their support of the white national party. The British journalist had approached a few newspapers to attempt to expose Verwoerd's lie—"if *New Age* could do it, he would take a chance risk by giving a lift to anyone that the movement thought should leave the country very quickly" (ibid). Kgositsile called his editor, Ruth First, and she amassed a number of people in the ANC leadership to discuss the proposition.

First invited the two men (Kgositsile and the journalist) to meet at an Indian restaurant called "Kapitans [...]" that had a section where if there were people of multiple races, [they] could be hidden away from the police" (ibid). Kgositsile arrived with the journalist to have a clandestine meeting with "a number of people in the leadership, the late [Walter] Sisulu, Duma Nokwe³¹, Joe Slovo³² [...] I don't remember everybody else who was there" (ibid). By the end of that meeting he was told to go home and be ready to leave the following day (ibid). At the time Kgositsile did not fully comprehend the urgency of the situation, "but it turned out that if I had not left I would have been in trouble. That actually with a number of my

³¹ Member of the National Executive Committee of the ANC in 1956, Treason Trial accused, and member of the banned South African Communist Party.

³² Active member of the South African Communist Party who helped draw the Freedom Charter, and was a Treason Trial defendant. He was also Ruth First's husband.

colleagues, those who did not manage to leave soon after I left, ended up either in detention or under house arrest” (ibid). Verwoerd and his security police cracked down on any ‘communist activities’, and soon after Kgositsile left Ruth First was the first detainee of the newly-constituted Ninety Day Detention Act³³. These events threw a massive blanket of silence and censorship on the cultural production of South Africa.

In 1961, at age 23, overwhelmed by the turn of events, but heeding the instructions of the ANC leadership, Kgositsile went home to pack a few of his meagre belongings. He could not tell his mother the truth of his impending political exile, so upon his farewell he told her, “[he] was going to do an assignment in Lesotho so that if the special branch came to harass her she would lead them, if she broke down, to the opposite direction” (Interview 5, 2014). In his last hours standing face to face with the reality that he might never come back to South Africa, Kgositsile packed his Setswana books in his luggage. He recalls,

I think by then already I considered them part of my most valuable movable property, so to speak. They were practically like friends, very close friends that I spent a lot of time with. At the time I would not have been able to explain the attachment (Interview 5, 2014).

Kgositsile, on his departure, took his Setswana classics which would become his muse and library of literary heritage. He carried a batch of some of the first published books in the Setswana language, including LD Raditladi’s dramas *Motswasele II*, *Dintshontsho tsa Lorato*, and his poetry collection *Sefalana sa Menate*, and an anthology of poetry he features in, *Boswa jwa Puo*; DP Moloto’s *Motimedi*; P Leseiyane’s *Moremogolo wa Motho*; and DPS Monyaise’s novels. He understood them to be “nourishment” (Interview 2, 2013):

I think my sense of who I was even as an aspiring writer, must have led me readily more to Setswana classics than English ones. Actually I didn’t realise it had been apparent to other people too, until years later, in the late 1970s, when Joe Gqabi, who had also worked at *New Age*, after years on Robben Island, when he got released, as soon as he got to Botswana, even before I knew he was in Botswana, how I knew he was there, [was that] he sent me a nice little package of Setswana books, to let me know

³³ Her memoir *117 Days* (1965) is a recollection of this time. The 90 Day Detention Act meant one would be arrested for ninety days without trial or access to a lawyer; later doubled to 180 days.

he was out and well. It was at that point that I realised that other people I spent time with had seen how I value my Setswana literature (Interview 5, 2014).

With “no clearly-spelled-out mandate” (Interview 1, 2013) for him, Kgositsile and his companion left South Africa after midnight, headed for Tanganyika. They crossed into Botswana via the Ramatlabana border. He got off the car before the border and walked parallel to the road, hidden in the bushes, across the border, and go back to the main road on the other side to act like a hitchhiker (ibid). He remembers the South African exit and traversing the crocodile-infested Limpopo River on foot, with the reality of the situation finally sinking in. Before stepping into the Limpopo he paused and thought of writing his mother a letter in case he did not make it across the famished river, but immediately dismissed that reservation (Interview 5: 2014). He swam across successfully. Crossing the other borders, from Botswana onwards, would be fairly easy. The two men arrived in Tanganyika a few days before independence celebration on December 9th, 1961. Upon arrival Kgositsile was stationed at the ANC offices in Dar es Salaam, the heart of Tanganyika.

2.2 *Exile Years*

2.2.1 *Tanganyika/Tanzania: 1961*

In Dar es Salaam Kgositsile settled and started writing for a communist newspaper *Spearhead*, edited and published by ANC member and lawyer Frene Ginwala. Ginwala was a second generation Indian born in Johannesburg in 1932. She joined the ANC in the mid-1950s and worked closely with Walter Sisulu. She was also instructed by Sisulu to leave the country, and she went to visit her parents in Mozambique, eventually ending up in Tanzania. She assisted many exiled members of the ANC, and helped “establish the ANC in exile” (ibid). *Spearhead*, a monthly journal, was conceived as a tool to bring continental attention to the atrocities of the apartheid government, to put pressure of that regime. The title is a reference to ANC’s armed wing uMkhonto we Sizwe, or ‘the spear of the nation’.

Shortly after arriving in Dar es Salaam, in neighbouring Uganda the Makerere conference on ‘African Literature in the English Language’ took place in June, 1962, and although Kgositsile was not able to attend, Joe Louw, his colleague at *Spearhead* went and brought back some novels out of West and East Africa. Kgositsile recollects,

it was the first time that a number of us were exposed to what was coming out of other parts of Africa, mainly West Africa in this case. That's when we got work by Chris Okigbo, Achebe, Soyinka, Cyprian Ekwensi, J.P. Clarke, and I would say for the first time we were immersed in literature from our contemporaries from other parts of the continent. It was almost overwhelming. You know, you understand that here is an aspiring young writer who has not been exposed to too much literature by fellow Africans in English, in the language he's working in, and then all of a sudden there is this abundance, and a diversity of styles, and none of the nonsense that the casualties of colonial education called the queen's language. [...] So it was adding more evidence to what Richard Wright had showed me could be done. And from then on of course, the rest is history (Interview 5, 2014).

Kgositsile's field of influences grew, as did his determination to tame the English language. It was in Dar es Salaam that Kgositsile started toying with the ideas of also writing fiction. Influenced by the fabulous decade and *Drum* writers, Kgositsile attempted writing a short story or two, "but never really produced anything that was satisfactory even to [him]" (Interview 3, 2013). After the Makerere conference of 1962 in Uganda, Es'kia Mphahlele, who was in attendance, stopped in Dar es Salaam before heading to his home in exile, Nigeria. He met with Kgositsile, who shared his new short story with him since Mphahlele had been the fiction editor for *Drum*. Mphahlele "went over the piece in detail and without him saying it at the end of that I knew very clearly that I couldn't write fiction and that that piece was probably even BAD" (ibid). From this encounter with Mphahlele Kgositsile realised that he could not write stories because he thought in images³⁴. He then wrote something in verse, "read it, and recognised it as a poem, because [he] read a lot" (ibid), and thus a poet was born.

In Tanzania he thought he would be at the heat of the hammer, being trained to return to South Africa for full on armed resistance against the national party. When nothing political was happening, except writing for the newspaper, he was disillusioned, "even occasionally depressed" (Interview 1, 2013). A number of other young comrades in exile there were also frustrated, seemingly living without any purpose. During this time the ANC offices, through

³⁴ The implication of thinking in images is the focus of Chapter Five.

diplomatic relations, received offers for scholarships from Cuba, and shortly after, ANC's first group of students went to study in Cuba (ibid). Towards the end of 1962, the embassy of the United States of America also offered scholarships to "African students on a program administered by the Africa-America Institute, funded by the U.S. government" (ibid, 5). This scholarship offer sent African students to Lincoln University, a historically black institution. Kgositsile was offered that scholarship, and left Tanzania for the United States. He arrived in New York in December 1962.

2.2.2 United States of America: 1962 – 1975

Arriving in New York City, Kgositsile was "at the coalface of the ferment of cultural and political revival in Harlem", as Sam Raditlhalo so aptly puts it (2012: 420). Black America was driving resistance movements for civil rights all over the country, and Kgositsile, coming from the ANC "participated fully, but [he] participated as a South African in solidarity with our brothers and sisters in the diaspora. Coming from the ANC and the alliance, for [him] it was simply a different site of our struggle in its internationalist perspective. It was very logical" (Interview 3, 2013). Lincoln University, situated in Oxford, Pennsylvania, was a key site for the development of black student politics, and that university's newspaper *The Lincolnian* was the mouthpiece for civil rights, linking resistance movements from the west to the east coast. Lincoln featured, as Stéphane Robolin adds, "a black international student body and became a meeting ground for African American and African students including Kwame Nkrumah, Nnamdi Azikiwe" (Robolin, 2015: 92). On the grounds of that university, African and Afro-American students found intimacy through political exchanges, with South African students highlighting the plight of blacks in South Africa, and by so doing bringing attention to the similarities between black Americans experiences with those of South Africa.

When he arrived at Lincoln University, Kgositsile also continued to quench the thirst for black writers that started in South Africa in the United States Information Offices. He was still determined to handle language in a manner that would make it native. He tells Rowell in 1973³⁵, "when I first came here I went to Lincoln University in Pennsylvania, where I spent a lot of time in the library trying to read as much black literature as I could lay my hands on" (Rowell, 1978: 28). He explains in our interview that "it was an internationalist interest"

³⁵ The interview was conducted in 1973, but the paper was only published in 1978.

(Interview 1, 2013). Kgositsile advocated a pan-Africanist perspective of the struggle culturally and politically, having been exposed to the affinities between black South Africa and black America whilst still in his home country. Finding pan-African continuities in the political struggles of black people, and the cultural convergence of experiences as witnessed in Afro-American texts and jazz, provided emotional placement for Kgositsile in the U.S. He tells Rowell, “in no time I was practically at home within a few months of my arrival in this country—i.e., at home as far as the black community, black writers, and black musicians” (Rowell, 1978: 29).

Kgositsile spent his time between Lincoln University and New York City, where he stayed with South African friends Hugh Masekela and Jonas Gwangwa, who shared an apartment. Gwangwa is a trombonist whom Kgositsile was in high school with, and who travelled to the U.S. after leaving South Africa in 1961 through his involvement with the musical *King Kong*—Harry Bloom and Todd Matshikiza’s famous stage show about a boxer living in Sophiatown, which toured England. Kgositsile also knew Masekela from high school when he still performed with the Huddleston Jazz Band. Masekela recalls that

around thanksgiving, the first wave of South African students from the PAC [Pan African Congress] and the ANC refugee camps in Tanzania arrived in America to attend school at Lincoln University [...] At the beginning of the Christmas holiday season, Joe Louw, Willie Kgositsile, and Peter Davidson came to visit. [...] But the arrival of my holiday visitors didn’t go unnoticed by federal authorities. To my surprise, an unmarked car suddenly appeared and stayed parked outside my apartment building (Masekela & Cheers, 2004: 155).

The apartment building was in Harlem, in New York City’s upper Manhattan—a predominantly black political and cultural hub of civil rights movements which was often marked by the ‘eyes’ of government’s Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). Kgositsile’s name made it onto their list for most of his stay in America.

Through Gwangwa and Masekela, he tells Rowell, Kgositsile met young writers such as Amiri Baraka (then LeRoi Jones), [jazz and bebop scholar] A.B. Spellman, [literary scholar and writer] David Henderson, [novelist and poet] Ishmael Reed, [poet] Askia Toure (then Roland Snellings), and [poet] Barbara Simmons (in Rowell, 1978: 29). There was a lot of

activity culturally, as Baraka had just started the Black Arts Theatre in Harlem (BATH); and Henderson, Reed and Toure, alongside Jayne Cortez and Quincy Troupe were members of a black literary group '*Umbra*'. Kgositsile aligned himself with them, and was part of *Umbra* in its short duration before it merged with Baraka's BATH to become the Black Arts Movement.

Politically his immersion into Afro-American politics had a sense of continuity: "as someone who was already political, on arrival I knew I had to meet people who were doing things politically, and at the top of that list was Malcolm X, and I met him very soon after my arrival there. I met Martin Luther King, I met Stokely Carmichael who was president of Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC)" (Interview 1, 2013). SNCC was a 1960-founded student political group that began direct-action protests in the form of sit-ins through the mobilising of local communities. Kgositsile immediately found a 'political home' with SNCC who also mobilised at Lincoln University, and was soon travelling south with the organisation to incite the fires of southern civil rights. These cultural and political uprisings "made the first years in New York not only comfortable, but in a sense exciting" (in Rowell, 1978: 29).

Just like in South Africa in the 1940s and 1950s, black liberation movements were strongly tied to cultural uprisings, most notably jazz. Kgositsile speaks of arriving in New York City as 'continuity' in a sense that on the first evening he arrived and was checked into a hotel in mid-Manhattan, "the first thing [he] decided to do was get on a subway and go to Harlem to find some jazz clubs" (Interview 5: 2014). He adds that with regards to those clubs, he had heard of some of them and had imagined what some venues looked like: "we had a picture of what to expect" (Interview 2, 2013). The familiarity with which he traversed the streets of New York on his first night speaks volumes of the intimacy between black South Africa and black America. His movements became congruent with overarching political, cultural, and historical movements of the two countries, and the capacity of jazz to make exile feel like home was promising. In 1974 he wrote a collection of poems dedicated to jazz musicians under the general title of 'Home is Where the Music Is'; a title appropriated from Hugh Masekela's album of 1972. If *mbaqanga*'s lyrics preoccupied themselves with cultural boycotts, bus boycotts, stay-aways, and protest rhetoric, then Afro-American jazz, particularly free jazz, aligned itself with black liberation movements, most notably 'Max Roach's Freedom Now Suite: We Insist' (1960) whose record cover represents direct action

protest in the form of a sit-in. Three of the five tracks on the album are titled ‘All Africa’, ‘Freedom Day’, and ‘Tears for Johannesburg’. The latter responds to the Sharpeville massacre in South Africa³⁶. When it came to jazz, “night time was the right time” to produce pan-African relations, as Kgositsile proclaimed in his poem ‘Time’ (1971), echoing Ray Charles.

Kgositsile’s membership of SNCC came with demanding responsibilities. As SNCC gained a stronghold with mobilizing the community in the south, Kgositsile was travelling constantly to Mississippi, living off a wage of ten dollars a week³⁷. In the south they were tasked with organising the ‘Freedom Vote’ in support of the formation of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. That party was an effort to challenge the legitimacy of Mississippi’s all-white Democratic Party. SNCC organised and registered voters during what was called the ‘Freedom Summer’ in 1964, with the support of influential regional and local civil rights leaders. Malcolm X visited Lincoln University with Abdullah Abdur-Razzaq—Lincoln Alumni and X’s ‘right hand’—to give a fiery talk promoting student radical politics in the fall of 1964. Kgositsile was in attendance, and Malcolm X prised his eyes open to the dangers of ‘nonviolence’ against such a brutally violent structure. The wave of social uprisings reverberated in from the West Coast to Detroit and Chicago, Harlem and Brooklyn in 1964, where protesters such as Baraka refused to renounce violence in the quest for black self-determination. Around this time X found acquaintance with one of the leaders of the 1964 Zanzibar Revolution, Ahmed Mohammad Babu, and together they met with Baraka in January 1965 where, “a key issue in the unresolved all night debate [8 p.m until 8 a.m] was whether the main enemy was racism or capitalism: race or class” (Woodard in Joseph, 2006: 65). Malcolm X “had publicly called for a Bandung³⁸ strategy, a united front against colonialism” (ibid). The struggle for black self-determination would espouse an internationalist perspective. It was a positively turbulent period.

³⁶ In the liner notes he explains, “Tears for Johannesburg sums up, in large sense, what the players and signers of the album are trying to communicate. There is still an incredible and bloody cruelty against African Americans, as in the Sharpeville massacres of South Africa. There is still much to be won in America. But, as the soloists indicate after Abbey’s wounding threnody, there will be no stopping the grasp for freedom everywhere” (Liner notes by Nat Hentoff, 1960).

³⁷ <http://circle.org/jsourc/student-nonviolent-coordinating-committee/>

³⁸ Bandung refers to the first large-scale Afro-Asian Bandung conference held in 1954 in Indonesia, in which most leaders of those colonised states met to discuss the oppressive structures of both capitalism and colonialism.

1965 was a watershed year in America. Malcolm X was assassinated in February of that year. In the aftermath of the tragedy of what seemed like a “dream deferred”³⁹, rose the Black Power movement, led by a new generation of leaders. In that context, “Baraka plotted how to carry the baton of international struggle” (Woodard in Joseph, 2006: 65). From this internationalist perspective, the label ‘negro’ was renounced for a more inclusionary ‘black’; and because Baraka had already established Black Arts Reparatory Theatre, the emergence of the Black Power movement motivated the merging of that group with Umbra to create a larger umbrella of black arts. This is how the Black Arts Movement (BAM) was formed—the cultural sister of Black Power movement—both determined to continue the legacy of Malcolm X. In the west coast, the Watts Rebellions of 1965 in California were also a sign of black cultural awareness and militancy on the rise nationwide. Kgositsile has generous references to Watts in his poetry, mostly juxtaposing it with Sharpeville. This stems from his travels with Baraka to Oakland, the home of Black Panthers, where the BAM had established alliances “Black Arts for Black Panthers” (ibid: 66) with that militant group. Black Power and Black Arts movements initially consisted of Angela Davis, Rap Brown, Nikki Giovanni, Stokely Carmichael, Huey Newton, Bobby Hutton, Kathleen Cleaver, Amiri Baraka, Sonia Sanchez, Keorapetse Kgositsile, Askia Toure, Haki Madhubuti and Ntozakhe Shange. Kgositsile dedicated his first collection of poetry, *Spirits Unchained* (1969), to Black Panther founder Bobby Hutton and Dedan Kimathi⁴⁰, leader of the Kenyan liberation army or Mau-Mau’s.

Senegalese poet-president Léopold Senghor offered the capital of his country, Dakar, in 1966 to host the First World Festival of Negro Arts (1er Festival Mondial des Arts Nègres, or FESMAN). The festival was organised around the theme, ‘Significance of Black Art in the Life of the Black Man’. It was a platform to celebrate black creativity and “to allow artists of black origin to be known and appreciated in an atmosphere of tolerance, mutual esteem and intellectual fulfilment” (Press release, 1966). Kgositsile recalls that, “Dakar Festival was publicised all over, and as a younger writer I was very interested in going, so what I did was I managed to get assigned to cover the festival by a number of publications” (Interview 5, 2014). That was Kgositsile’s first return to the continent since 1962, and his first time in West

³⁹ From Kgositsile’s essay title, ‘The Tragedy of a Dream Deferred’, published by *Negro Digest* in November 1968

⁴⁰ Kimathi was a Kenyan rebel leader who fought against British colonialism in Kenya in the 1950s. He was arrested and executed by the British colonial government in 1957
<http://rastaites.com/news/hearticals/kenya/kimathibio.htm>

Africa. There he met many of the writers whose work had influenced his quest to tame the English language, and his politics of blackness: “I first met Achebe there, Soyinka, JP Clarke, Aimé Césaire, I think I already knew Langston Hughes; Léon Damas from Guyana, Edouard Maunick, Lindsay Barrett [...] I can go on and on” (ibid). He met Cuban writers, writers from Latin America and the Soviet Union, “those friendships, through arts and culture built stronger ties than any diplomatic mission can” (ibid).

However Kgositsile was plagued by the community’s lack of involvement in the festival, exposing failed pan-African solidarity, as he would report in the *Liberator* of July, 1966:

During the festival there was a fence around the slums surrounding downtown Dakar. ... in his opening speech Léopold Senghor said that the Senegalese had assumed the responsibility of organizing the Festival ‘for the defence and illustration of Negritude’ ... but the audiences were predominantly white! ... Not only has the white colonialist oppressed the black man over the years, he has also depersonalised him to the extent that the majority of black people who have had any intellectual contact with the Western world are estranged from themselves. And the tragic aspect of it is that they do not even know it (Kgositsile, 1966: 11).

Clearly influenced by Frantz Fanon’s analysis of the pathology of colonial oppression, Kgositsile did not hold back in this essay titled ‘I have had Enough’, critiqued the *négritude* approach to black self-determination⁴¹. He feels *négritude* is a type of “an academic masturbation or deviation, a kind of mannerism—fornicating with the white eye and then emerging on some stage with Western arguments for the validity and glory of a black Virginité” (Kgositsile, 1968, 40). Es’kia Mphahlele was also a principal opponent of the poetics of the Negritude movement, as was Nigerian playwright Wole Soyinka. Mphahlele critiqued the emergent modern national literatures in European languages which forged an alliance with the emergent national bourgeoisie in Africa. Senghor “was then a classic representation of this unholy alliance: he was both the President of Senegal and Senegal’s

⁴¹ Kgositsile argued in ‘Young Black Poets’ that “this decade—the sixties—has produced a different calibre of black poets in America. The majority of them have been influenced by Negritude and protest poets ... These young poets felt the inadequacy of a purely ‘cultural’ or artistic self-determination ... (Césaire, though among the Negritude poets, is above this because he is right there, ‘seering into the future’ with the best of the younger poets). ... Negritude poetry is inadequate in terms of its best possible social relevance or uses because it is limited to vision. It justifies Black Art and Black Experience to a white audience” (*Negro Digest*, 1968: 40) and in ‘Paths to the Future’, *The Black Aesthetic*, 1972: 236.

leading national writer [... who] represented the cultural interests of the national bourgeoisie”⁴². Negritude was also critiqued for the “black romanticism and biological ontology of Leopold Sedar Senghor” (ibid). Mphahlele added, “the poetry of negritude origin may also falsify the image of Africa by representing it as a symbol of innocence, purity, naked beauty, [and] human decency” (Mphahlele, 1972: 137).

Kgositsile takes this up in his post-Dakar essay ‘I have had Enough: Report on Dakar Festival of Negro Arts’, where he concludes, “a hungry man understands only satisfaction: ‘I’m hungry’, he’ll say, battered spear in his hand. ‘But you have a glorious past’. ‘Fuck the past. My son died of malnutrition’. ‘But you have rhythm’. ‘When is this independence nonsense going to stop? We have had enough’” (Kgositsile, 1966: 11). The brazen experiences of Dakar festival sowed existential angst in Kgositsile with regards to the dawn of independence on the continent. He expressed this disenchantment in his poem, ‘Bleached Callouses, Africa, 1966’ (*Black Dialogue*, 1967), where he mourns “weak-kneed / dreams abandoned by hope slobbering / fat-bellied in the mud do you ever / have dreams with calloused hands / do you ever see the tubercular / shadow of your father numbed / by endless kneeling abandoning / memory and desire choking / so that you can breathe”. The poem bitterly regrets the failure of post-independence in Senegal (partially independent in 1960) where the dreams of the masses have not been realised, if they were fenced out of a festival organised to celebrate their art and life. The masses have abandoned hope as they mangle bread-and-butter politics: there are the swollen-bellied from malnutrition, and fat-bellied from neo-colonial gains.

The disillusionment with post-independence made an impact on Kgositsile’s consciousness, as did the Vietnam War, according to Kgositsile’s comrade Sterling Plumpp (Interview, 2014). The war inaugurated an identity shift on Afro-Americans, most notable in SNCC’s anti-Vietnam-War campaign, discouraging Afro-Americans to accept conscription to the war. The horror of finding himself in the cauldron of a brutal capitalist and white supremacist government—Cold War and McCarthyism America—made Kgositsile recoil into jazz.

He frequented a lot of live jazz performances with Max Roach and Abbey Lincoln. He also spent a lot of time with Jackie Mclean at his house (Anderson interview, 2014), as well as at the house of Pharoah Sanders and his South African wife Thembi. Talking about the

⁴² <http://pzacad.pitzer.edu/NAM/sophia/writers/mpahlele/mpahleleS.htm>

influence of free jazz on him, Kgositsile muses, “if you think like Coltrane and Sanders [...] clearly their music in a revolutionary sense [...] was already international in its thrust [...] So in my development as a young or would-be poet I guess there was an appeal to liberate my imagination to break all the artificially created borders whether they were political, linguistic, artistic, whatever” (Interview 2, 2013). During his visits Sanders would finger his instrument, tenor saxophone, for hours without producing any music per se. He explained that “when he is on stage and takes a solo and music is happening, that his fingers don’t betray him, that they would play the music that is coming out of him” (Interview 2, 2013). From this relationship Kgositsile would write the liner notes to Sanders 1971 critically acclaimed album ‘Thembi’.

In the meantime, with all the political activities with SNCC, and his immersion into New York jazz scene, Kgositsile’s studies at Lincoln came to a halt. According to historian and Lincoln alumni Sam Anderson, there was no black history department, and if you wanted black aesthetic and culture you had to find it (Interview, 2014). Only the librarian Everett Hoagland, a black intellectual who catalogued black literature, had made it worthwhile and memorable for Kgositsile to be at Lincoln, but nothing more than what New York could offer. Kgositsile moved to New York City and became active in the Black Power and Black Arts movements. By 1969 Kgositsile’s name and politics were widely known through his work published in black journals, books and magazines such as *Soul Book* (1964), *Transition* (1965), *Contrast* (1966), *Poems Now* (Ed. Hettie Jones, 1966), *Journal of Black Poetry* (1967), *Negro Digest* (1967), *Pan-African Journal* (1968), *Black Fire: An Anthology of African American Writing* (1968), *Black Arts: An Anthology of Black Creation* (1969), and *For Malcolm: Poems on the life and the death of Malcolm X* (1969). Through these publications, in 1969 he won the Conrad Kent Rivers Memorial Award given by *Negro Digest*. His self-education away from lecture rooms led him to spend numerous hours a day at the Schomburg Centre for Research in Black Culture; whilst his other time was spent with new SNCC president Rap Brown (who was known to popularise the saying “violence is as American as cherry pie”), whose radical stance towards black liberation cherished violence over nonviolence. Kgositsile would eventually complete his Bachelor of Arts degree at the New School in New York City in 1967.

Some of Kgositsile’s poems published individually in the various black presses came together to form his first collection of poetry *Spirits Unchained: Paeans*, published in 1969 by

Broadside Press⁴³. Being an exile figure himself, in his debut collection he honoured the spirit of those who were not confined to a particular space, who “because of the demands of the period [...] travelled because you believed whatever the issue was that people wanted to get together about, that you could also make a little contribution. [...] People were prepared for the ultimate sacrifice, their lives” (Interview 1, 2013). The paeans were ‘sang’ or read out loud in a recording released “on tape, in a limited edition of fifty copies” (1969: blurb). *Spirits Unchained* brings together important components in Kgositsile’s development as a writer and political figure: the tango between poetry, jazz, and politics are salient in the collection; and the pan-African advocacy evinced in the index page. All the poems in that collection are dedicated to political figures spanning the African continent and its diaspora. Kgositsile explains that the poems were “not written as a collection [...] When Broadside Press asked me for a collection I decided to pick out poems dedicated to that kind of person” (Interview 1, 2013). To identify spirits that are unchained was an act of self-reflexivity for Kgositsile.

During his travels under the auspices of “Black Arts for Black Panthers”, Kgositsile met and fell in love with an Afro-American woman from Oakland named Melba Johnson. Johnson was politically active, and was involved, through the Bay Area militancy, in the politics of Cuba and southern Africa via organising cultural boycotts (Anderson interview, 2014). Karen Spellman reveals that “Melba was a missionary. Her mother evidently was very strongly in the church. She worked in West Africa, I think Sierra Leone or Gambia” (Interview, 2014). Her time in Africa in her youth made her gravitate towards activism. As Spellman adds, “so Melba was introduced to Africa before she met Willy” (ibid). Johnson and Keorapetse Kgositsile got married in 1967 and moved to New York to live together in a mid-Manhattan apartment. Times were tough financially as Kgositsile had dedicated his time to writing, most of the time drawing no salary or payment for his contributions. Spellman notes that Melba was the main breadwinner for the house (ibid). Sam Anderson adds, “Melba was a calming effect on Willy. She was active in her own right. She did some work with black women’s groups. She was connected with other sisters in the struggle, at the same time trying to run her household. [...] They had a lovely place on Riverside back in those days when you could afford to live in a good place if you knew the right person at the right time” (Interview,

⁴³ Dudley Randall founded the publishing company Broadside Press in 1965 to receive the creative outpouring from voices such as Nikki Giovanni, Sonia Sanchez, Etheridge Knight, Audrey Lorde and Keorapetse Kgositsile.

2014). Johnson was “devoted to Willy”, according to Rashida Ismaili and Evelyn Neal in our interviews.

Howard Dodson, Melba’s colleague and later director of the Schomburg Centre in New York, worked for an organisation called the Council of Interracial Books for Children where Johnson was working as a researcher—“she was in the council because of her activism around teaching specifically about the black experience, but about blacks and women and cultural experiences generally. The council as an organisation started off as an instrument for critiquing racism and sexism in school textbooks nationally” (Interview, 2014). In 1969 Melba got pregnant, and it “was transformative for Willy; this baby coming into this world. I don’t remember where he was that time in terms of teaching or just writing. [...] Melba was easily the love of his life” (Anderson interview, 2014). They gave birth to a baby girl, in 1969, whom they named Ipeleng Aneb Kgositsile, after Kgositsile’s sister, Ipeleng. Gloria House, a comrade whom Kgositsile had met during the Mississippi Freedom Summer, had been Kgositsile’s “strongest supporter”, and changed her names to Aneb Kgositsile. The new parents named their daughter ‘Aneb’, after Kgositsile’s diaspora sister. Kgositsile’s second collection *For Melba* (1970) is homage of his love for his wife, Melba, and their daughter Ipeleng Aneb Kgositsile.

Around that time in 1968 Kgositsile received news about the death of his mother, and, as he details in a letter to Es’kia Mphahlele in 1970, “the past two years or so were, I think, the worst years of my life [...] I am a broken man now. I know death, our impotence, very intimately. [...] Bra Zeke, I am very lonely” (Manganyi & Attwell, 2010: 197). In 1969 he registered for a Masters in Arts at Columbia University, and found a great friendship with Gwendolyn Brooks. Brooks had been part of an older generation of writers who saw the 1960s black liberation movements as positively turbulent. As Plumpp told me, Brooks “was not afraid of the possible chaos that could arise from these young poets” (Interview, 2014). Brooks “wrote about black people with great eloquence”⁴⁴ (ibid), and in her *Family Pictures* (1970) she dedicates a poem to ‘Young Heroes’, Kgositsile being one of the three. That poem makes part of her glowing introduction to Kgositsile’s third collection. In that ‘portrait’

⁴⁴ In his *The Unbroken Song* (1981) Es’kia Mphahlele has a section titled ‘Dedication to Voices in the Whirlwind’, whose four sections are “For Dennis Brutus”; “For Kgositsile”; “For Gwendolyn Brooks”; and “For Chabi and Puso”. In ‘For Gwendolyn Brooks’ he muses, “Thanks for the incisive image. / You are a focus of / the many streams of Black reality; / Your heart straddles / the times of unobtrusive grief / to times of rage; / rendering the drama / you bring home the meaning” (Mphahlele, 1981: 303).

Kgositsile is saluted in a poem whose “central idea [...] is that Willie is a hero and poet largely because he understands that art improves life. Since Afro-Americans are threatened with genocide, the Black poet must teach that the only viable response is to unify in order to resist violently” (Hansell, 1977: 64). As Victoria Harris contends, “Kgositsile [...] becomes a symbol for the new artistic as well as cultural movement. [...] He is a poet, thus a creator, one who can order as well as perceive existence. Brooks’ message remains undeniably a call to arms, but her weapon is art” (Harris, 1979: 63). Don Lee (Haki Madhubuti) and Walter Bradford are celebrated in addition to Kgositsile as ‘Young Heroes’.

Kgositsile admits that he gets surprised to find out how much there is of Brooks in his writing, “not in any mimetic way, but influence” (Interview 2, 2013). Influences and collaborations characterise Kgositsile’s diaspora work. Brooks wrote the introduction to his third collection, *My Name is Afrika* (1971). Kgositsile wrote the introduction for *Black Arts: An Anthology of Black Creation* (1969). Through poet Quincy Troupe, Kgositsile met Ethiopian modernist painter, Skunder Boghossian⁴⁵, and the latter illustrated and designed the cover for *My Name is Afrika*, as well as that of *The Present is a Dangerous Place to Live* (both editions: 1974 & 1993). Kgositsile also spent time with Trinidadian artist, writer and intellectual, Leroy Clarke, who dedicated a poem to Kgositsile in one of his collections *Douens* (1976). Collaborations between Black Arts and the Free Southern Theatre inspired a friendship between Tom Dent⁴⁶ and Kgositsile, and in his *Magnolia Street* (1976) Dent concludes a moving preface by expressing his indebtedness to Kgositsile’s influence on him—“Maybe someday I can pass on to someone else struggling to gain confidence in this passionate work something of what Kgositsile has bequeathed to me”. In his *Blue Lights and River Songs* (1982) he writes a poem ‘For Kgositsile’. Through travelling to Chicago/Detroit to liaise with his publishers Third World Press and Broadside Press respectively, Kgositsile made acquaintance with George Kent, Brooks’ biographer, who wrote an introduction to his fourth collection *The Present is a Dangerous Place to Live* (1974).

⁴⁵ Known as an artist-seer for his ritual-inspired, hallucinatory surreal paintings, Boghossian is Ethiopian-born and played an important role in introducing modernist styles from Africa to the West.

⁴⁶ Thomas Govington Dent, a New Orleans native, worked with the Umbra Workshop in New York City in the early 1960s, and co-founded the Free Southern Theatre writing workshop that became Blkartsouth in the late 1960s and 1970s. His “Herculean efforts to keep a group of Black writers workshopping in New Orleans through the Congo Square Writer’s Union in the 1980s” were inspired largely by his friend and mentor Keorapetse Kgositsile <https://www.questia.com/library/journal/1G1-152934685/tom-dent-s-role-in-the-organizational-mentoring-of>

My Name is Afrika (1971) was initially submitted to Columbia University as part of the requirements for the fulfilment of a Masters degree in Arts. It was initially dedicated “For Malcolm and Frantz Fanon” in its original manuscript, but would, in its published form, be dedicated to Hoyt W. Fuller—editor of *Black World* who also pushed for an internationalist perspective, changing the exclusionary title of the magazine *Negro Digest* to *Black World*. Fuller believed in Kgositsile’s writing and politics, and, as Plumpp recalls, Fuller “made sure [Kgositsile] got the Conrad Kent Award” (Interview, 2014). Plumpp wrote a long and moving ode ‘Seasons (For Keorapetse, Hoyt, & Ayi Kwei)’ that was published in *Black World* in March 1975. Kgositsile’s 1971 collection is his *Magnum opus*⁴⁷ representing a reclamation and assertion of his identity and roots, a type of ‘rites of passage’ as alluded in his letter to Mphahlele, “I know the resulting stench of cynicism. You see, I *was* very romantic. A great deal of it is in my writing, affirming shit that does not even exist past words. [...] Doubleday is going to publish a book of mine later this year: MY NAME IS AFRIKA” (Manganyi & Attwell, 2010: 197; my emphasis). The bitterness and disillusionment is most evident in a poem such as ‘For Sons of Sonless Fathers’, first published in September 1969, whose black nationalist disenchantment even elicited a retort⁴⁸—‘For Grandsons of Sonless Fathers’⁴⁹—from Octave Lilly.

Amilcar Cabral’s visit to New York in 1972 was monumental in Kgositsile’s life. He was known to echo Cabral’s philosophies on the role of culture in national liberation, and was witnessed by Sam Anderson (Interview, 2014) imbibing Cabral’s *Returning to the Source* (1973) like a fiend—with religious devotion. He strove for consistency in writing, but had developed a “stench of cynicism” that depleted his inspiration. He explains to Mphahlele, “I am trying to write a bit of fiction. It is very poor work, I think, and my present attitude towards writing makes chances of inspiration practically nil. But I will plod along like the old ox I feel like” (Manganyi & Attwell, 2010: 197). Cabral seem to reignite his passion to use ‘culture as a weapon’, and in 1972 Kgositsile put a call out to African writers to submit

⁴⁷ 89 pages long, it is a collection that demonstrates that he is “one of Africa’s ablest young poet-militants”, as the review of *My Name is Afrika* by Richard Bauerle promises. His first two collections had been remarkably slimmer. This third one was a ‘coming-out’ collection.

⁴⁸ Tom Dent explains in his paper, “One of the poems Octave Lilly published in *Black World* was critical of a black nationalist poem written by my close friend, the exiled South African poet Keorapetse Kgositsile, who often visited New Orleans. So, on one of Kgositsile’s visits, we decided to call People’s to see if we could meet Lilly and , well, just talk. The meeting was not only cordial, but led to a friendship across generations. I saw Lilly often after that, as did Kgositsile whenever he returned to town, until Lilly’s death a few years later” (Dent, 1984: 22-23).

⁴⁹ Published in *Black World* of September 1970.

poems to be published in an anthology of poetry *The Word is Here* (1973) that he edited. The poems are prefaced by an introduction highlighting Mazisi Kunene's trajectories and philosophies as a writer, and position the anthology to "reflect the pulse of Africa today" (Kgositsile, 1973: xvii). The pulse is indicative of an/other language:

Kunene [...] makes his poetry in Zulu [...] He then translates into "English" in order to publish his work for an English-dominated readership, thus being forced to murder a great deal of the intense internal rhythms of his Zulu poems. p'Bitek wrote *Song of Lawino* in Acoli, and did what Kunene does, thus rendering "the sharp edges of the warrior's sword rusty and blunt". U Tam'si writes in "French" but bends it to be as close to African expression as he can make it, in very much the same way that the authentic Black musician in America has used European musical instruments to express the depth of Black feeling he is connected to (Kgositsile, 1973: xvii).

Kgositsile laments the blunt and rusty sword that comes with translation in Kunene and p'Bitek's poetry. However, he does not rebuke their work⁵⁰. If anything, he celebrates their poetry by bringing to light that although the work is in "English", the poems still pulsate with Zulu and Acoli. His notation of 'English' in quotation marks is telling of the manner in which the 'English' in both Kunene and p'Bitek's poems is not a standardized one. Both their poems are therein anthologised. Kgositsile's introduction revisits the question of language and translation, and the anthology seeks to map "From the North", "From the South", "From the East", "From the Centre", and "From the West", poetry written in English with an African accent native to those regions⁵¹. Bending the colonial languages to be as close to African expression as possible was a preoccupation and commitment in Kgositsile's writing.

Kgositsile's *The Present is a Dangerous Place to Live* (1974) is most expressive of the anguish of exile, and is epitomised in the poem 'Exile', prefaced by an epilogue from Aimé Césaire—"my memory is surrounded by blood / my memory has its belt of corpses" (1974: 15). Reading Cabral's *Return to the Source* (1973) alongside Césaire's *Return to my Native Land* (1947) filled Kgositsile with despair coupled with an unbreakable resolve to advocate

⁵⁰ Kgositsile considers Kunene "the greatest writer" (in Plumpp, 2014).

⁵¹ Kgositsile's selection demonstrates what Carli Coetzee (2013) calls "resistance to absorption", which is the right to maintain, preserve and valorise one's set of differences, whether linguistic, perceptual or cultural. Coetzee argues against translation that "domesticates" indigenous languages into English language, and rather for "foreignising" (Venuti, 1998) English translations.
<http://www.ajol.info/index.php/tvl/article/viewFile/102266/92302>

for a return to the continent. At this point, in 1974, he had taken appointment at University of Denver, Colorado, where he received a young Mongane Wally Serote, who had just registered for his Masters in Arts degree at Columbia University in New York. Serote sought Kgositsile as an instructor, or dissertation supervisor, in Denver while registered at Columbia. Serote arrived a battered man, recently released from prison and solitary confinement for his activities as an uMkhonto we Sizwe (MK—the ANC’s armed military wing) cadre⁵². Kgositsile translated America for Serote. As Robolin puts it, “not unlike Richard Wright, who welcomed African Americans in adopted Paris decades earlier, Kgositsile served as a cultural mediator by introducing newly arrived South African exiles to existing black American artistic and intellectual circles” (Robolin, 2015: 79). This is what Serote recalls of his time spent with Kgositsile traversing the country, performing and attending jazz clubs:

I became very conscious of living in a world power. I became very aware that America is an extremely reckless world power. If I heard what they did to Vietnam [...] to their own people—the Afro-Americans; I became very aware of their terrorist activities in the whole of Latin America. I was very amazed by this because when you are in South Africa America somehow hides this hard character of its own. It purports and plays the role of being highly developed, highly civilised, highly democratic country. Whereas it is an extremely brutal country. It uses its power as a world power to crush all the weak people in the world, seeking their resources. [...] When Bra Willy and I kept talking about how the Vietnamese resisted and eventually defeated America; it was a sign to us that no matter the power of the apartheid system, we will find a way to defeat it. [...] This was for me, outside of the university, with Bra Willy, and being a writer; this was to me an exposure of how the world runs. That actually the whole world is held at gunpoint because if you moved out of the focus of the American system you became a victim, or designated a rebellious person. Which was not different from what South Africa had said about us: we were called communists and terrorists. [...] It was a very important moment of learning for this Alexandra boy (Interview, 2014).

Those were the factors contributing to Kgositsile’s melancholia and disillusionment as expressed in the collection *The Present is a Dangerous Place to Live*. His series of poems

⁵² Serote recounts his experience in our interview, “I had to leave. I was detained in 1969. I was kept in solitary confinement for 9 months. ... We were brutally tortured ... I was 24 then, and you’re kept in this little cell alone” (interview, 2014).

‘Deathdose’ in *For Melba* (1970) was also an articulation of a metaphysical death—a persistent affectual dimension of America’s inhumanity. This title moved Ethiopian modernist painter Skunder Boghossian to paint and theme his work ‘The present is a dangerous place to live (Homage to Kgositsile)’ in the exhibition ‘Howard University Faculty Show’ in 1975. Boghossian and Kgositsile had found artistic affinities and eventual friendship through the former’s visual art appearing on the covers of *My Name is Afrika* (1971), and both editions of *The Present is a Dangerous Place to Live* (1973; 1993). Boghossian’s abstract paintings captured African mythologies through a modern aesthetic that was appealing to and responded to Kgositsile’s own thematic and philosophical concerns.

If Kgositsile translated America for Serote, then Serote brought first-hand news of the horrors of township living under apartheid in South Africa. He updated Kgositsile on the South African Student Organisation (SASO) that was spearheading the Black Consciousness Movement, and various factions of the liberation struggle within South Africa. Serote’s second collection *Tsetlo* (1974) had a palpable militancy that was immediate and inspiring for Kgositsile. His spirit was finally rejuvenated through this comradeship, and he would enter the new year of 1975 with a resolve to return back to the source. His fifth and final collection published in the United States attests to this. *Places and Bloodstains* (1975) demonstrates a shift in consciousness from the other four which were largely dedicated to diasporic political figures and movements. *Places and Bloodstains*, with an introduction by Chinua Achebe, is “dedicated to the brothers and sisters who picked up arms to create a place for us in *Southern Africa*” (1975: Dedication; my emphasis), and the poems are mostly written for South Africans such as Can Themba, [BCM member] Ilva Mckay, [PAC activist and poet] Dennis Brutus, Es’kia Mphahlele, [*mbaqanga* musician] Gwigwi Mrwebi, [poet] Cecil Abrahams, [MDALI—an umbrella organisation of Music, Drama, Arts & Literature—member] Montshiwa Moroke, and [American-based South African actor] Zakes Mokae. The ideological shift became apparent in the publication of the poem ‘Places and Bloodstains’⁵³ in its original Setswana in the *Black World* of February 1975.

⁵³ The poem ‘Places and Bloodstains’ seems like Kgositsile’s attempt to reimagine and rewrite Césaire’s epic *Return to my Native Land*, in Setswana. The English translation has its thematic, structural and linguistic influences. The matter that Kunene wrote the introduction to Césaire’s epic might have led Kgositsile to reread that epic with different eyes.

Kgositsile was inspired by his deep longing for return to the continent to look into his cultural reservoir aesthetically. Poems from that fifth collection, such as ‘Son of Mokae’, demonstrate a straining of the English language to carry the oral cultures of southern Africa. He reflects on this time:

A literary scholar from Trinidad made a comment to the effect that he picked up some kind of shift in my work in the latter years in America. And my response, which was very brief, was that I would hope that my literary output would be contemporaneous with my development intellectually, emotionally and ideologically. And I suppose what I was trying to get at was that; those years, in the exile years, if you stayed a bit too long in the States and you started getting frustrated as I did because although you might be internationalist in outlook, you start feeling a little too far removed from your site of struggle, your little corner of the world, that frustration makes it almost confrontational; confrontational in the way that a lot of nationalists—African Americans—tend to be (Interview 6, 2015).

In retrospect, this period, 1974 and 1975, marks the tail end of the civil right movement. The frustrations that Kgositsile refers to with regards to nationalism are part of the main reasons he desired to leave the U.S., and part of why Black Power and Black Arts movements ceased to function. Both movements were an expression of African American struggles, and brought together different streams of African American thought. They fostered and deployed an African voice to deny the West, and this is how Kgositsile readily stood in solidarity with their struggle. However, cultural nationalism plagued Black Power movements. Kgositsile mourns Black Power rhetorics such as “I am black and I am proud”, as well as the black nation of Islam moment, as the decisive factors in the redundancy of nationalism: “we no longer / sing. Except perhaps some hideous / gibberish like james brown making believe / he is american or beautiful or proud. Or / some fool’s reference to allah who, like / jehovah, never gave a two-bit shit about niggers” (1974: 19).

This evokes his earlier critique of *negritude* based on a similar premise. For Kgositsile cultural nationalism deterred the journey towards black emancipation. He later referred to black nationalism as “bullshit coldwar talk” (1971: 83), which in essence critiques its re-imagining of an African identity rooted in an idyllic precolonial Africa to be avoiding the real matter of fighting the dehumanising oppression at hand. Capitalism and white supremacy

were working in tandem to oppress black people; and the division was sowed amongst the movements by those who espoused Marxism and nationalism. The latter were decentered by the former, since the former were internationalist in thrust, reinforced by the sixth pan-African Congress in Tanzania. Based on this, Kgositsile sought to divorce himself from the politics of civil rights—“still we talk *somuch*” (ibid; original emphasis)—and move back to the continent.

It was around that time that he found refuge with comrades from South Africa in the U.S. By then Dennis Brutus⁵⁴ was as a visiting professor at the University of Texas at Austin in 1974, where he headed the formation of the African Literature Association (ALA) with Kgositsile. They were both at the African Studies Association meeting in Chicago in October 1974 where they decided to form an ALA⁵⁵. Brutus adds, “another South African writer, Willy Kgositsile, and I, were the nucleus. The other South African writers were Mongane Wally Serote, Oswald Joseph Mtshali and Zeke Mphahlele” (Sustar & Karim [Ed], 2006: 160-161). The ALA conference which was inaugurated as a symposium of South African writers took place in March 1975. The biggest concentration of African writers ever would become “the ALA, by coincidence [...] because I had a program already in place for a Sharpeville Memorial Day. It turned into an African writer’s symposium, which in turn became the ALA” (ibid: 161). Also invited were Kofi Awoonor and Ama Ata Aidoo from Ghana. Kgositsile was on the ‘Panel on Literature and Commitment in South Africa’, where he opened with the following statements,

The writer—I suspect Achebe would definitely agree—functions as an educator whether he realizes it or not, because although not all propaganda is writing, every statement you make [...] is a piece of propaganda. [...] anytime you open your mouth, or you sit as a writer, you are either opposing, affirming, or proposing certain values, which means every time you do that, you are showing your commitment. In a situation

⁵⁴ Brutus had been well known and celebrated for his campaign of having apartheid South Africa banned from the Olympic Games. He had also published *Sirens, Knuckles and Boots* (1963), *Letters to Martha and Other Poems from a South African Prison* (1968), *Poems from Algiers* (1970), *A Simple Lust* (1973), and *China Poems* (1975).

⁵⁵ Kgositsile is not usually associated with the founding of the ALA, and his position in the founding of that organisation differs from that of other long-standing members such as Es’kia Mphahlele and Dennis Brutus. This is owed to his itinerant career, which has led to his exclusion in almost all organisations he started or was central to (such as BAM), and also reveals the limitation of such place-bound institutional memory.

of oppression, there are no choices beyond didactic writing; either you are a tool of oppression or an instrument of liberation (Kgositsile, 1976: 34-35).

Kgositsile cites Chinua Achebe's essay 'The Novelist as Teacher', in which Achebe writes that "the writer cannot expect to be excused from the task of re-education and regeneration that must be done" (Achebe, 1965). The prefix "re-" is congruent with Kgositsile's motion of opposing, affirming or proposing. When opposing apartheid's hegemonic narratives, Kgositsile uses his own 'propaganda' to affirm that which has been left out or denigrated by the apartheid propagandist machine. For example, when he uses Setswana idioms, names, and proverbs, he affirms his history and identity which both the colonial and apartheid apparatus sought to relegate to the margins. In that sense he is re-educating, as Achebe proposes, and regenerating a history that has been left to ossify by the grand narratives of white supremacy. He is in turn re-educating and regenerating in order to propose a reimagining, re-membering⁵⁶, and reinventing of self, as well as reawakening from colonial alienation. Kgositsile recorded his ruminations on writing processes in *A Capsule Course in Black Poetry Writing* (1975) in collaboration with Gwendolyn Brooks and Haki Madhubuti.

Out of that symposium was published a slim anthology of *South African Voices*⁵⁷ (1975), edited by Bernth Lindfors. The African Literature Association was a salient moment in the history of South African literature, and still continues to run annual conferences to date. The Sharpeville Memorial Day commemorated at the conference signalled fourteen years since Kgositsile fled his country into exile. The years in the black diaspora, in the heart of a world power, revealed a complex pedagogy and praxis of oppression. It was now time for him to get back on the continent, align himself with the movement, and be at the battlefield against colonialism and apartheid.

2.2.3 Return to the Source(s): 1975—

In 1975 Kgositsile felt a burning desire to return to the continent where he could be closer to the activities of the ANC and also contribute his scholarly achievements to the continent.

⁵⁶ Homi Bhabha conceptualises re-membering as "a putting together of a dismembered past to make sense of the trauma of the present" (Bhabha, 1994: 90).

⁵⁷ The South African voices represented are Dennis Brutus, Keorapetse Kgositsile, Mazisi Kunene, Ezekiel Mphahlele, Oswald Mtshali, Cosmo Pieterse, and Mongane Serote; who were all the South Africans present at the ALA. As the preface foretells "the poems were read by the poets themselves on the evening of March 21, 1975—the fifteenth anniversary of the massacre at Sharpeville" (Lindfors, 1975).

Oliver Tambo was at the time president of the ANC, and he was stationed in London. Kgositsile devised means to go to London and propose to his leadership ways to get him and his family back on the continent. In London he was reunited with Duma Nokwe, who was then just appointed the deputy secretary-general of the ANC, as well as that party's director of international affairs. Kgositsile's time with Nokwe in London, albeit less than a month, was one of learning and being inducted in the politics of internationalism. Nokwe, who had travelled with Moses Kotane and Oliver Tambo to the Soviet Union and China on ANC missions, assuaged Kgositsile's contemptuous talk about Afro-America's nationalism by sharing key literature that would change the course of his politics and writing. He gifted Kgositsile with Moses Kotane's biography *Moses Kotane: South African Revolutionary* (Bunting, 1975), as well as pamphlets from previous key conferences in the Soviet Union, China, and Cuba. He also appeased Kgositsile's desires by buying him a ticket to Tanzania, to be stationed at the ANC camps. Nokwe's guidance was so magnanimous that Kgositsile soon after named his son after him⁵⁸.

When he arrived in Tanzania and was appointed by the University of Dar es Salaam, Kgositsile was immediately immersed in the politics, movements, and cultural tasks of the ANC whose camps were in Morogoro, 169 kilometres west of Dar es Salaam. In the summer of 1975 in the U.S., during a poetry reading in Atlanta, he had met Grant Kimanju, the then head of literature department at the University of Dar es Salaam. Kimanju was there with a particular mission of recruiting Kgositsile. Kgositsile recalls:

Of course I was very very happy. But then at first after my arrival, his detractors with strong nationalistic or chauvinistic sentiments, it turned out, were not happy with the recruitment. He had to fight. So I did not arrive and start work immediately. But that was good—I was back in Africa anyway. [...] after I had been there for two or three years he invited Alex La Guma⁵⁹ and that also raised quite a bit of a qualm, because

⁵⁸ In Kgositsile's eyes, Nokwe was actively dedicated in the struggle. He was a leftist, and committed his life to carry out that mission. Kgositsile strove to be like him, and is often spoken of in those terms. Kgositsile's poem 'A Luta Continua' is dedicated to Duma Nokwe, and celebrated Nokwe's left sentiments by comparing him to Che Guevara.

⁵⁹ Kgositsile organised that La Guma, who was then Assistant editor of *Lotus*, become writer-in-residence at the University of Dar es Salaam (Field, 2010: 195-197). It would be the first time they meet in person although they were both very familiar of each others' work from the days of *New Age* throughout the years. They would affectionately refer to each other as "my kroon, a respectful form of address found in Cape prison and gang slang used by someone seeking a favour" (Field, 2010: 223). The phrase "my kroon" may be found in the dedication section of *To the Bitter End* (1995) where he addresses La Guma.

then some were saying ‘all he’s interested in is bringing in these useless communist failures; first he brings us this Kgositsile, and now this La Guma’. But it was good to be there at the time because also what it meant was that I could not only teach; since we [ANC] had a mission there, I could also be directly involved with the day to day issues of struggle; of our struggle (Interview 6, 2015).

Kgositsile was inducted back into the missions of the movement. He immediately aligned himself with the South African Communist Party (SACP), and embraced members Nokwe, J.B. Marks, Alex La Guma, and Moses Kotane as fighters. He dedicated poems for them that appeared in *Somehow We Survive* (1981), and through them travelled to the left countries that were friends of anti-apartheid South Africa: Cuba, German Democratic, and the Soviet Union. He became a committed leftist in ideology and praxis, as his poetry post-America shows, and was actively and dedicatedly involved in the struggle. Travels to Russia revealed to Kgositsile for the first time what a true revolution could look like, where the people had education, housing and health care. Kgositsile salutes J.B Marks for having a vision for a very long time to set up such a society in post-apartheid South Africa. Kgositsile refers to Marks as ‘malume’, Tswana for uncle, in his poetry to emphasize that elder’s mentorship. He was also moved by a trip to Uzbekistan where after a poetry reading a young girl came to him with a collection of revolutionary poetry in which he was anthologized, and asked him to explain an issue she did not fully grasp (Interview 6, 2015). This for him further reinforced the commitment to fight alongside the communist party.

As already briefed by Nokwe, he travelled the Soviet bloc and China as a member of the Afro-Asian People’s Solidarity Organisation (AAPSO) as well as its literary wing Afro-Asian Writer’s Association (AAWA). The co-constitutive organisations grew out of the Bandung conference of 1955, and cherished the same principles. Roger Field elucidates in his political biography of Alex La Guma (general secretary of AAWA), “a project of the Soviet Union’s Afro-Asian Solidarity Movement [and] a product of the Cold War, the AAWA saw world politics as a conflict between Zionism and economic, political, and cultural imperialism and neo-colonialism on one hand, and national liberation struggles in Africa and Asia, including the Middle East, on the other” (Field, 2010: 169-170). The AAWA set up a quarterly journal

called *Lotus*, in which Kgositsile's poetry appears on a number of occasions, and its 1976 edition was devoted to South African writers⁶⁰ (ibid).

If Kgositsile's poetry had always been contemporaneous with where he was politically, spiritually, emotionally, and culturally, then the poems that were published beyond the American exile years were most significant to his affinities and allegiances. Shortly after his arrival in Tanzania the youth of Soweto in South Africa took to the streets to demonstrate against the apartheid government's law of using Afrikaans as a medium of instruction. Politically things had been brewing in a different manner from the 1950s. Since the Sharpeville massacre, the banning of political parties and the blanketing of black South Africa in censorship, a more clandestine approach to politics and culture was in effect. The underground became an active space more importantly in the 1960s, a decade in which the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) was launched and became active. The BCM had mobilised students across the country, through philosophies that emphasised psychological liberation and restoration of self-love as black people—ideas that were diametrically opposed to the propaganda the white regime were actively pushing. Legislating Afrikaans as a medium of instruction was a culmination of efforts to alienate blacks from themselves, and to totally strip them of dignity in order to reduce them to automatons ripe for the picking of cheap labour. The decisive action of the students of 1976 on June 16 reflected the militant mood Kgositsile yearned for all his years in exile. His last anthology published in the U.S. was dedicated to BCM, BPC (Black People's Convention)—an umbrella organisation of the Black Consciousness Movement—and MDALI.

The Soweto youth uprising inspired the heightened pace of militancy and firebrand in Kgositsile's poetry. His poem 'June 16 Year of the Spear'⁶¹ (1982) is a memorial to those event. Seen as having spurred on the second wave of exile after the Sharpeville massacre, the youth uprising is largely accepted to be the beginning of the end of apartheid. Situated at the ANC headquarters in Dar es Salaam, Kgositsile was also actively involved in receiving fleeing youth from South Africa, who arrived in Morogoro, and consequently necessitated the formation of the Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College in 1977 to educate them. From all

⁶⁰ It carried contributions from Dennis Brutus, Barry Feinberg, C.J. Driver, Keorapetse Kgositsile, Arthur Nortje, A.C. Jordan, ANC Khumalo, Basil February and Alex La Guma.

⁶¹ The ANC had decreed 1979 the Year of the Spear, "the first in a planned three-year advance to 'all-out people's war'" (Wylie, 2008: 124). Kgositsile understood this resolve to be strongly inspired by the youth uprisings in 1976, hence the June 16 reference.

these events a turn is observed in the poems Kgositsile published in two key publications around this time: *Poets to the People* (Feinberg [Ed.], 1980), and *Somehow We Survive* (Plumpp [Ed.], 1982). The poems, ‘New Age’, ‘A Luta Continua’, ‘Manifesto’, and ‘South Africa Salutes Uzbekistan’ were the new ones to appear in the former anthology. The poem ‘South Africa Salutes Uzbekistan’ became an anthem of uMkhonto we Sizwe⁶² (MK). Consisting mostly of the ‘new batch’ of students from South Africa, the new MK members had been familiar with Kgositsile’s poetry through the underground movement of literature. Literary scholar Muxe Nkondo details the occasion of reading Kgositsile’s poetry in the 1960s:

When I started teaching literature, at the then University of the North, I found a very subversive way to teach his [Kgositsile] work to my students without citing him. I remember very well, me and the late [Mbulelo] Mzamane met in Braamfontein sponsored by the Institute of Race Relations, to talk about literature and censorship. In a very subversive way we decided to read Kgositsile’s work without identifying the author. Luckily for us the security police were so semi-literate they couldn’t tell what we were talking about. They couldn’t tell the difference between Kgositsile and other people. That’s when I started knowing of him. I also got to know him because he was very early on close to Can Themba. When I was in matric at Orlando High School Can Themba used to come and talk to us as students, and as he would be talking, he’d find a way of referring to banned poets like Kgositsile, so we had some intimation of where he was going (Interview 1, 2013).

There was no greater welcome than having students from South Africa recite his poetry to him each time they encountered him in Tanzania and other African countries. He muses on this, “I met many younger writers, other cultural workers and activists [...] Usually when we met, there would be a little amused giggle or mischievous grin from them as we shook hands [...] When I would want to find out what the joke was [...] one or several of them would recite some of my work, complete with the sound of my voice [...] Perhaps *that* was my Homecoming” (1991: 10). Albeit this is a reflection of arriving in South Africa in 1991, Kgositsile shared a similar story about encountering these youth in Tanzania who recited his

⁶² The MK were known to chant Kgositsile’s poem during training. Years later, upon return to South Africa, when he met former MK members, they would recite that poem to him. And that, according to Kgositsile felt like a proper homecoming.

work. That was enough to let him know he is now home, and the poem 'New Age' (1981) expresses the dawn of a new era beyond Afro-American cultural nationalism:

Remember O Poet
When some of your colleagues meet
They do not talk the glories of the past
Or turn their tongues blackwards
In platitudes or idealistic delirium
About change through chance or beauty
Or the perversion you call love
Which be nothing
But the Western pairing of parasites

Through the work with the ANC and AWWA, Kgositsile's hunger had been satiated, and he was no longer plagued by the rhetoric and sloganeering that had frustrated him in America: "we have a glorious past", "change is gonna come", or "black is beautiful". Being back on the continent meant he also was closer to the pulse of anti-colonial revolutions, whose reverberations were felt in the work of Jorge Rebelo and Agostinho Neto, and commemorated in Kgositsile's 'June 16 Year of the Spear'. Neto led the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) in the war for independence, and became the first president of liberated Angola in 1975. His collection of poetry *Sacred Hope* (1974) set him up as a celebrated poet-president⁶³. Similarly, Rebelo, known as the "poet of the Mozambican revolution", was the secretary for information for the Mozambican anti-Portuguese guerrilla movement FRELIMO. He published a collection of poetry *When Bullets Begin to Flower* (1972). It becomes very apparent that Kgositsile began modelling himself on these two revolutionary poets whose lines pulsed with desire and determination for liberation in their lifetime. He heeds Rebelo's call for the revolutionary poet to "forge simple words / that even children can understand, / words which will enter every house, / like the wind / and fall like red hot embers, / on our people's souls, / for in our land , bullets are beginning / to flower" (Rebelo). This stanza was circulated as part of a FRELIMO poster. Kgositsile 'responded' to Rebelo's call as thus, "my blood has been hammered to liberationsong / and like Rebelo's bullets / And Neto's sacred hope / I am flowering / ... / all over this land of mine / I am the

⁶³ South African writer Mandla Langa titled his 1987 novel *Tenderness of Blood* after a line from Neto's poem 'Haste'.

new chapter / I am the way forward from Soweto 1976 / I am poetry flowering with an AK47 / all over this land of mine”. This way, Kgositsile set himself up as poet of the South African revolution.

In 1977 he attended the almost-month-long celebrations (15 January – 12 February) of the Second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC) hosted in Lagos, Nigeria. This was a great opportunity to reunite with some old and new South African comrades in arts, sporadically scattered around the world since 1960 (Sharpeville massacre) or 1976 (student uprising). The arts scene in South Africa still mourns the lost opportunity for a seminal word-to-music album of readings by Kgositsile collaborating with veteran bassist from South African jazz band Blue Notes, Johnny Dyani. Its failure was due to bureaucracy: “in Nigeria, Bra Willie had a reading accompanied by bassist Johnny Dyani. The session so moved the owner of Island Records that he immediately offered up a contract. The British, however, wouldn’t toss up visas. So the recording did not happen. Thus, a glorious moment was lost in history” (Rampolokeng, *The Sunday Independent*, 15 April 2007). In the poem ‘Johnny Dyani’ by Kgositsile on South African rapper Tumi Molekane’s ‘Tumi and the Volumes’ album (2006), Kgositsile laments that lost moment.

Around 1976 Kgositsile was in negotiations with his wife Melba Kgositsile, whom he had been trying to convince to bring their daughter Ipeleng to live in Dar es Salaam. Towards the end of 1976, “with the help of Oliver Tambo” (Plumpp interview, 2014), Kgositsile sent them ANC-issued one-way tickets to that Tanzanian city, but did not hear from her again (Plumpp interview, 2014). In 1978 however Melba assisted Sterling Plumpp in starting to put together an anthology of South African writing. She is acknowledged in the anthology *Somehow We Survive* “for supplying contacts and providing sources from which to make selections” (Plumpp [Ed.], 1982), as well as recommending and contacting foremost South African abstractionist painter Dumile Feni, to illustrate the book. Kgositsile wrote the preface of the book. Around this time Melba complained to Plumpp, then good friends with Kgositsile, that the South African poet and father to her child had abandoned her, and that he and the ANC should do something about Ipeleng’s education. In our interview, Ipeleng Kgositsile reflects, “I come from very revolutionary parents. [...] Some of my youth was also sacrificed. [...] Any poem that has my name in it becomes so important to me because this paper [poem/letter/book] then represents this missing father for me” (Interview, 2014). Ipeleng came to see the ANC as her rival sibling (ibid).

Kgositsile submitted the poems ‘Letter to Ipeleng on her Birthday 1976’, ‘My Sister’, ‘Chimid: A Memorial’, ‘Seaparankoe’, and ‘June 16 Year of the Spear’, for publication in *Somehow We Survive* (1982). The poem ‘Letter to Ipeleng on her Birthday’ (1982: 20) was indeed a letter sent to Melba for then-six year old Ipeleng, heart-wrenching and brutally honest in a recount of his pain and conflicted position of leaving his family for national struggle. It chronicles those emotions,

What is it on your birthday
You want your main man to tell
Your peers who do not have the luxury
Of childhood or the tyranny of fear

How shall I say happy birthday
To you today when young blood flows
Down ghetto and small town streets
Where butcher savages practice their orgies
With jackboots, batons, bayonets and bullets
[...]
And you must possess and be possessed
By ‘a thousand thundering voices
Which call you from the place of the sinking sun’

Because your peers do not have the luxury
Of childhood or the tyranny of fear
Remember this
There is no birth without blood
LIBERATION IN OUR LIFETIME
Is the only gateway to
Happy Birthday

Here the visceral fissure between the personal and political begins to presents itself in Kgositsile’s poetry. Kgositsile calls on Mazisi Kunene—through citing Kunene’s lines ‘possess [...] a thousand thundering voices / which call you from the place of the sinking

sun⁶⁴ — to assist in the confronting fault line between personal and political desires.

Kgositsile cloaks his message in Kunene's heroic voice to negotiate the pain that comes with commitment to revolutionary action that suffuses personal commitments: liberation in our lifetime is the only gateway to happy birthday. He also calls on the image of the Soweto uprising to speak to the plight of all children as being his plight. In our interview Ipeleng reflects on this time, and recalls that it was also around the event of her father sending a request for divorce from her mother. They finalised their divorce in 1977. Plumpp concludes that Kgositsile's career can be summed up with the poems he wrote to Ipeleng (Interview, 2014).

In 1978 Kgositsile met and married exiled South African Baleka Mbete, when Mbete was running a fundraising for the Voice of Women (VOW), a quarterly magazine of the ANC women's section. Kgositsile was immediately taken by the "brilliant comrade" (Plumpp interview, 2014) whose radical sentiments of the struggle were symbolised in the firearm she carried around (ibid). At the time, Kgositsile aligned himself with SACP and ANC comrades believed armed struggle was the only feasible way to overthrow the apartheid government. Mbete became instrumental in relaying the struggles of women in the liberation movement to Kgositsile, and his next collection of poems, all written to and for women, combines old and new poems. The collection *Heartprints* (1980) is "dedicated to all our women – our grandmothers, mothers, aunts, sisters, wives, daughters and cousins in our struggle for national liberation and especially to the Women's Section of the African National Congress" (1980: 6). It is published in the German Democratic Republic, with illustrations by Dumile Feni. He introduces the collection as thus, "I find out from Baleka that VOW [...] has no funds. Publication might have to stop. We must do something to help VOW survive. A book, posters, something we must do to raise the necessary funds. [...] So here it is. [...] The proceeds go to VOW. AMANDLA! MAATLA! March 12, 1979" (1980: 8). Plumpp contends that Kgositsile matured as a poet when he was with Baleka (Interview 2, 2014).

In 1980 the ANC adopted tactical principles aimed at developing insurrectionary potential in the townships of South Africa from neighbouring Botswana. This was the "all-out people's war" mandated by the ANC's declaration of 1979 the Year of the Spear. There, in Gaborone, a troupe of artists with ANC affiliations had formed an art collective called Medu Arts

⁶⁴ Kunene in 'Abundance' (1970: 43)

Ensemble. Among the members were ANC-trained members Wally Serote, Thami Mnyele and Mandla Langa, who tasked themselves with providing propaganda to send to South African townships to “detonate a popular revolt” (Wylie, 2006: 125). As “links between the ANC in Botswana and progressive organisations at home” were developing, the ANC “sent to Medu [...] poet Willie Kgositsile and singer Baleka Kgositsile” (ibid). They arrived in 1982 after living in Lusaka, Zambia, between 1980 and 1982. That year the ‘Culture and Resistance’ conference organised by Medu was held from July 5th to July 9th at the University of Botswana, under the impetus of examining and proposing suggestions for the role of art in the pursuit of a future democratic South Africa (Peffer, 2009: 79). Kgositsile was the keynote speaker, and “his passionately partisan speech set the politicised tone for the rest of the festival” (ibid). He proposed the title “cultural worker” as opposed to “the more elitist term, artist”, to meet the need of the struggle for workers that serve it. This way Kgositsile elevated the position of the cultural worker to that of any other worker in the struggle. He asserted that there was “no such creature as a revolutionary soloist” in a struggle for national liberation (Kgositsile, 1986: 31). “Cultural worker” became the phrase of the moment, and moulded the politicised propagandist work that came out of Medu into South African townships.

Out of these developments the role of culture in the struggle for national liberation became a mainstream agenda in the ANC in exile. By this time Kgositsile was outspoken about the “backwardness” of the ANC when it came to culture—“within the movement [...] there is an annoying, criminal backwardness about culture, generally, and its role in society at any given time” (‘Culture as a Site of Struggle’ in *Staffrider*, 1992: 48). He laments that “it took the ANC until 1982, a period of seventy years, to establish the Department of Arts and Culture (DAC); and that was after the unarguable success of the historic Culture and Resistance festival earlier that year” (ibid). That festival was a watershed moment which led to the establishment of the Department of Arts and Culture in exile, and the launching of an in-house cultural journal, *Rixaka*. Kgositsile was appointed the deputy minister of that newly-founded department headed by Barbara Masekela. Further, this new department was represented at the ‘Culture in Another South Africa’ conference in Amsterdam⁶⁵ in 1987. The

⁶⁵ This arts festival was organised by the Dutch Anti-Apartheid Movement. A cultural boycott was voted for, and Holland minister of Culture was persuaded into a cultural agreement with the ANC. During his presentation Kgositsile urged Holland to propagate new values in the interests of humanity, and boycott the Nazi apartheid culture (Wylie, 2008: 165).

Amandla Cultural Ensemble emerged after *Mayibuye*⁶⁶, and featured in Kgositsile's 1982 keynote address: "The past few years have seen attempts by the artist, both at home and in exile, to organize themselves with the struggle and fashioning ways of making their talents functional in their communities and to the struggling masses of the people as a whole. *Mayibuye, Amandla!* are examples of such cultural collectives" (Kgositsile, 1986: 31).

Baleka bore three children with Keorapetse—Duma (named after Duma Nokwe), Ipuseng, and Neo. As active members of the liberation movement, Keorapetse and Baleka Kgositsile travelled so much that their then-youngest daughter Ipuseng, when asked where her father was, and if she looked and could not find him in the room, would answer, "he is at the airport" (Interview 6, 2015). They did not enjoy much of family life. Their marriage was built on revolutionary commitment before anything else, and their interactions were by letters, or through encounters in transit. All three poems written for Baleka during that time lament a distance between them "like mountains" (1990: 11). He instructs her that "when you do not receive a letter from me / ask Tambo for the keys to my heart / where all your letters are / ... / ask MK, ask the youth / ... / and if you cannot see them / through the tears of your loneliness / ask your heart" (Kgositsile, 1988: 5). They cherished the ideals of a revolutionary love, "as I miss you now / without complaint or despair / my heart defies every inch of air / between Dar es Salaam and Mayakovsky Square" (1990: 54).

The further south of the continent he travelled, the more determined he was to get back to 'the land that sings who he is' (Interview 2, 2013). Botswana had a special history for him, being a Tswana speaker, and having grown up just a stone-throw away from the South African-Botswana border. It was a central place to telling his story. In that country he searched and found parts of his family from his father's side, and finally met his father for the first time. It was a "relatively easy" (Interview 6, 2015) meeting as he was sensitive to the brutality that he had incurred in his life, and the conditions which were bent on dividing black families. In a poem to Madikeledi 'The Elegance of Memory' (1971: 80), the only poem in which he overtly refers to his father, he writes of her, "Madikeledi, my grandmother, / as big-spirited as she was big-legged, / she would talk to me. She would / ... / how could I know

⁶⁶ Through the *Mayibuye* Cultural Ensemble of earlier years (1975 - 1980), "the Mermaid theatre in London had staged *Poets to the People* (Feinberg, 1974, 1980), billed as 'a dramatic presentation of South African freedom poems'" (Gilbert, 2007: 424). The shows composed of readings of poems from the anthology edited by Barry Feinberg; readings by Serote, Brute, Mtshali, Kunene, Kgositsile, Nortje, and Feinberg. 'Poets to the People' "was to become one of the central impetuses for the gradual integration of culture into the organised activities of the ANC in exile" (ibid).

her sadness then / or who broke my father's back? / but now ... ". The ellipses in this excerpt are pregnant. His grandmother spoke about Kgositsile's father with much empathy and compassion, to a grandson who at the time could not fully grasp the gravity of their politics in relation to black young men. But now as he meets his father he is fully conscious of the external antagonistic pressures that deferred their meeting until he was in his forties. He exercised the same kind of empathy and compassion in their meeting.

After the 'Culture and Resistance' conference, the University of Botswana offered him a post in the literature department. When the head of African literature realised that Kgositsile was not only proficient in Setswana, but was also knowledgeable of its literature, he recruited him to teach some course in his department. He had kept abreast with the development of Tswana literature over the years (Interview 2, 2013). So he taught both English and Tswana literatures at the University of Botswana from 1982 to 1987, whilst also featuring regularly in the ANC's cultural magazines *Sechaba* and *Rixaka*. The political and cultural work of the ANC had now started receiving international recognition and response. In 1987 Kgositsile joined *Amandla!* on its international tour to the United States. The main objective of this tour was to pressurise companies doing business with South Africa to divest. Kgositsile reunited with his daughter Ipeleng, and took her on every leg of the tour, as well as to a symposium held at the Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois⁶⁷. Whilst in Illinois, the mayor of Chicago, Harold Washington, conferred the key to the city of Chicago to Kgositsile. Washington died later that year, and Kgositsile wrote and read a tribute from the ANC at Washington's funeral.

Around 1987 the mounting pressures and regular clashes of work commitments, family duties, and political demands became overwhelming, and Kgositsile had become a troubled alcoholic. His poem 'When the Clouds Clear' chronicles his journey with alcohol—"when I lack it / I have no sleep / when I have it / I still lack sleep"—and also laments "my foolishness" at putting Baleka through the "prime of my slow death" (1990: 22-23). Baleka left him as alcoholism atop revolutionary duties was proving to be too much to bear. In a sense, *When the Clouds Clear* (1990), Kgositsile's seventh collection, and first to be published within South Africa (by the Congress of South African Writers or COSAW), confesses, through its title poem, to the failure of struggle. When the title of the collection

⁶⁷ Out of this symposium was published *Writers from South Africa: Culture, Politics and Literary Theory and Activity in South Africa Today* (Gibbons, 1989).

leads you to the title poem you are met with a bleak image, “she takes no part / in the prime of my slow death / her nerves are stretched irrational now / but stupidity much older than my generation / or I will ever be / pushes me into flames where / there is no elegance of eloquence / ... / if you see my back / wobbling down these mean streets / ... / know I killed the fragrance / of her hope and desire” (ibid). Ashamed, heart-broken, and disillusioned, Kgositsile sought refuge in Chicago from 1988 to 1991. Coupled with the poem ‘Luthuli Detachment’⁶⁸, the two poems offer a cynical commemoration of the release of political prisoners⁶⁹ in 1990.

In Chicago he lived with Aneb Kgositsile (Gloria House), Kgositsile’s sister in struggle, from Detroit who was instrumental in getting Kgositsile to start thinking about a detoxification plan. With the help of Haki Madibhuti, who owned the publishing house Third World Press that had published Kgositsile’s collections in the 1970s, Kgositsile was admitted into a rehabilitation centre. Madibhuti footed the hefty bill upon agreement with Kgositsile: he would pay back the money in the form of three publications with Third World Press. Kgositsile spent a year in the centre for addiction, and when he came out he published the second edition of *The Present is a Dangerous Place to Live* (1974, 1993), as well as a creative writing book that offers methods to develop poetry-writing skills, *Approaches to Poetry Writing* (1994). In 1995 he published his official eighth collection of poetry *To the Bitter End*, which also includes all the poems from *Places and Bloodstains* (1975).

The title *To the Bitter End* (1995) comes from the declaration, “COME THUNDER! CONFLAGRATION! [...] I will tell you right here and now that, like Castro, no force on this planet can move me from conviction about the principles of socialism. To the bitter end. Socialism or death. *Daar’s kak in die land*” (1991: 7). Kgositsile bitterness is palpable in the new poems that form that collection and mourn “the pitfalls of a national consciousness” (Fanon, 1961). He was in the U.S. during the South African key moment of the unbanning of political parties and release of political prisoners in 1990, even if not by choice; precariously battling his “foolishness” that “hurt these loves ones / when the deadly mortars of enemy fire / are here with us / every day and night” (1990: 22). Kgositsile here mourns the debilitating

⁶⁸ The poem ‘Luthuli Detachment’ (1990: 19) laments the “ambush” in the form of ideological conflict within the ANC; between capitalism and socialism, towards the release of political prisoners from Robben Island.

⁶⁹ Feeling international pressure from anti-apartheid movements, and being significantly affected by the economic sanctions against South Africa; coupled with the end of communism marked by the fall of the Berlin Wall, the apartheid government’s project was dismantling. On 11 February 1990 they released Nelson Mandela, followed by all the political prisoners on Robben Island.

effects of alcohol in his life, which created another enemy alongside that of white supremacy, against the survival of his family.

2.3 *(Symbolic) Return: 1991—*

In December of 1991 the Congress of South African Writers (COSAW) hosted a literature symposium in Johannesburg, under the rubric ‘New Nation Writers’ Conference’, with the theme of “Making Literature: Reconstruction in South Africa”. Kgotsitsile made his first trip to South Africa after thirty years in exile in order to attend it. He writes an essay on returning to the land that sings who he is in ‘Crossing Borders without leaving’, published in the *Staffrider* of 1991. The essay is punctuated with bitter irony directed at queuing up at “‘non-South African passport’ in your own country”; being hosted by COSAW—“Hosts! In my own country” (1991: 5-6). In that essay, Kgotsitsile is unequivocally proud of his proficiency in Setswana after all these years. This is occasioned by the mention of his high school teacher D.P.S Monyaise and his invaluable contribution to the milestone that would keep him committed to ‘nativizing’ the English language. The linguistic importance of this moment does not escape him in that moment when “the streets of Johannesburg cannot claim me. I cannot claim them either” because he could not find in those streets, “the link with any past and present, which should inform your future” (ibid). His language was a defining homecoming moment—the difference between finding links with the past and not. About homecoming he muses:

Delinquent brother, kind loving sister, comrade, I will not claim to know much about how some things in the everyday ordering of our lives could be explained. You see, at one level, my being here is a homecoming, in terms of the one who has been away. But at another level, the returning one has never left. [...] My people, I went away yes. But I never left. Even if I had wanted to ‘leave’ my language would not have allowed it; my memories and our collective memory would not have allowed it; my concerns, my daily preoccupations, would not have allowed it (Kgotsitsile, 1991: 8).

This moment in Kgotsitsile’s essay ties together his concerns over the years: his daily life has been ordered like an intricate tapestry of his ongoing materialising with home and exile. His memory and collective memory of his people shaped him linguistically, ideologically, political, culturally, psychologically and emotionally. He has been entangled in the ongoing

production of collective memory; Setswana could not leave him, and he could not leave the language because memory is not static, but constantly woven with his ontological and epistemological 'becoming'. The reclamation and assertion of his collective memory everywhere he has been informed all future desires, making Setswana become ever-present.

Kgositsile's relationship with Setswana language while writing in English offers an interesting perspective in the bifurcated debate between Chinua Achebe and Ngugi wa Thiongo. Achebe believed that African writers of the English language do not have to shun that language; that they should make the English language "carry the burden of their experience" (Achebe, 1965). Ngugi on the other hand believed that African writers need to write in their native tongues. He was understood by Kgositsile to be saying "when I tame English to sing who I am, I am not enriching Setswana, I'm enriching English" (Interview 6, 2015). Furthermore, writers such as "our first poet laureate [Mazisi Kunene] would argue that there is no African literature in any European language" (ibid).

To these debates Kgositsile adds his perspective, "in the final analysis, if we spoke of English it is not its Englishness that would interest me, but it would be how writers from different cultures who express themselves in English manage, or succeed, to make it be expressive of their ethos" (ibid). Kgositsile still understands the debate to be tricky and at times contradictory, for as much as Kunene repudiates African literature in European languages, he "readily accepts the authenticity of Césaire and Césaire expressed himself in French. I mean enough that he endorses it by writing this long introduction to Césaire's *Return to my Native Land*" (ibid: 10). In the final analysis it is the issue of "whether there is betrayal or not" (ibid), according to Kgositsile, and he furnishes an example from both politics and culture,

If we were talking about engaging the enemy on the battlefield, would we say for instance M'khonto we Sizwe was not authentic because they used AK 47s which were of Russian origin? And my answer would be, if you interact with the world on your terms then you pick up from other cultures whatever you pick up to reinforce yours, not to sacrifice it to the dictates of other cultures. And that if that is the case, and you are clear about who you are, it doesn't matter what instrument you end up using or from where. I would say the Swedish guy who invented the saxophone was not thinking of Kippie Moeketsi, John Coltrane, Pharoah Sanders, or Charlie Parker. But because they

knew who they were, they got it and expressed who they were musically, and nourished the world (ibid: 10).

Kgositsile here demonstrates that when people know who they are, and they engage with the world on their terms, they can remain authentic to the continuity and fluidity of their identity. This resolve is linked to fidelity to the collective consciousness and social awareness, as evinced in the overtly political reference to uM'khonto we Sizwe and their determination to reinforce the ANC nationalist agenda for the collective black people, as well as the selected saxophonist and their uncompromising approach to that instrument in the healing of self and the collective. For Kgositsile these three disciplines—the pen, the saxophone, and the AK47—are permeated by politics of self-determination, and he argues that they cannot be divorced from one another. He therefore believes that even though the English language is the coloniser's language, he can tame it and imbue into it the power to advance his particular struggles.

After the conference in Johannesburg Kgositsile travelled around the country performing poetry and running poetry workshops with his 'hosts' and publishers COSAW. On that tour he performed the poem 'Red Song', and his rendering, a combination of Tswana melodies and rhythms, jazz and blues signification that always tows the line between poetry and music, led to Vusi Mahlasela recording it as a blues song on his album 'When You Come Back' (1992). The notion of singing a poem is important in reading Kgositsile's poetry as he firmly believes in the fluidity between reciting a poem and launching into song in the southern African context. He adds that "at best poetry is music" (Interview 2, 2013). His poetry nuances the marriage between the two, most notably through his engagement with jazz musicians. The coming together of these forms is shaped by the oral traditions resource base. His poetry situates itself within the tradition of black expressive cultures, oral and aural, and through intertextuality he pays homage to the black archive and lineage.

Kgositsile returned to Chicago after his national book launch of *When the Clouds Clear* (1990), where he taught at Wayne State University. He took his son Duma with him. In 1993 he married Chicago-based law scholar Cheryl Harris, described by fellow scholar and friend Plumpp as a brilliant scholar whose knowledge of jazz and black politics were unsurpassed (she became the co-director of the Critical Race Studies Program at University of California, Los Angeles—UCLA). On this marriage, Plumpp comments in *The New Yorker* that "[he]

felt the diaspora had been reunited in their union” (23 May 2011). The timing of this statement is not lost in that the political prisoners in South Africa had been unbanned and released, which meant that exiled South Africans could also finally return ‘home’, but Kgositsile was evidently setting up life in Chicago, disrupting the narrative of return. The diaspora had been reunited because Africa and its diaspora were finding contiguities once more. The newlyweds gave birth to their son Neruda Thebe Kgositsile in 1994, named after revolutionary Chilean poet Pablo Neruda whom Kgositsile considers “the foremost poet of the 20th century” (Interview 1, 2013). The reasons for *The New Yorker* coverage are the brilliant lyricism of Thebe and his rise to fame as Earl Sweatshirt, with the hip hop outfit Odd Future. *The New Yorker* reports that Thebe “is a baby imbued with the spirit of South Africa’s martyred heroes”⁷⁰. Thebe, Tswana for ‘shield’, seems to celebrate the birth of a new nation of South Africa by imbuing the spirit of martyred heroes in him, not without the proper warning and arming with a shield. The couple moved to Los Angeles California, where they both took appointment with UCLA.

In California, Kgositsile missed an opportunity to reunite with his literary mentor and brother, Mazisi Kunene, who left UCLA in July 1993 after it had been his academic home from 1975 when Kgositsile left the U.S. Kgositsile spent the next six years following a pattern of spending six months in Los Angeles, where he taught one semester a year, and another six months in Johannesburg. This arrangement, in combination with other personal matters, did not work for his marriage to Harris, and they finalised their divorce in 2001. He returned to finally settle in South Africa in 2001. He published a selection of poems from previous publications in *If I could Sing* (2002), and a collection of all the poems he dedicated to music/ians in *This Way I Salute You* (2004)⁷¹. Kgositsile worked as Strategic Support for the Arts, Culture and Heritage services of the Johannesburg Metropolitan Council. In 2004 Kgositsile was appointed Special Adviser to the Minister of Arts and Culture, Pallo Jordan. After his return to South Africa, Kunene was inaugurated national poet laureate in March 2005 for his continuous literary output over the exile years. His tenure was not to last, for in 2006 he died, aged 76.

⁷⁰ <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2011/05/23/wheres-earl>

⁷¹ The title salutes Mongane Serote by appropriating the title from Serote’s poem ‘City Johannesburg’ (1972), a camaraderie that dates far back, since Serote appropriated Kgositsile’s line “to every birth its blood” (1969) as title of his 1981 novel.

In 2006 Kgositsile was conferred national poet laureate of South Africa by Pallo Jordan. In his speech Jordan praised Kgositsile for being not only a truly engaged poet but also a political activist of long standing, “who like Mao Zedong and Pablo Neruda had mastered the art of producing politically inspired poetry that did not compromise poetics to make a political statement”⁷². As an outspoken critic of the ANC’s stance on the arts and culture, Kgositsile envisions that his role as national poet laureate will not make him a puppet of government. He explains this concern to Lesego Rampolokeng, “the thrust of my writing is to affirm life as creative activity. Whatever forces there are standing in the way of that, at the moment of the engagement, those forces get attacked. If something contributes to that affirmation, there is celebration in the writing” (in *The Sunday Independent*, 15 April 2007).

Kgositsile’s role as mentor to younger poets cannot go unmentioned. He ran workshops in Johannesburg, Pretoria, Bloemfontein, and Cape Town, in which he encouraged young writers to train their voice in order to be true to their art. In 2009 he toured the United Kingdom with Don Mattera and two poets of the younger generation, Lebogang Mashile and Phillippa Yaa de Villiers. The tour ‘Beyond Words’ was “an exchange of literature between/among cultures” with hopes “of planting the seeds of understanding and friendship than any diplomatic mission”⁷³. Kgositsile published new poems in the four-person volume *Beyond Words: South African Poetics* (2009). Mashile, foremost South African black feminist performance poet and all-round artist, considers Kgositsile a mentor, and has stated in an interview with *Consciousness Magazine* that “I think when you create a piece of art, that art exists within its own realm. That realm kind of has its own logic. When I create a poem, in that poem I’m inventing a world. And that world has its own philosophy; it has its own way of understanding. When I am trying to give voice to that particular experience, I have to be true to that experience. [...] This understanding is something I got from Kgositsile”⁷⁴. These words resound in Kgositsile’s earlier manifestos. Inspired by her encounter with Kgositsile on that tour, De Villiers wrote a poem dedicated to him, that praises him as a mentor and father figure in her poem ‘Red Apples’ published in her *The Everyday Wife* (2010).

⁷² <http://www.gov.za/p-jordan-inauguration-kw-kgositsile-poet-laureate>

⁷³ <http://bookslive.co.za/blog/2009/10/26/keorapetse-kgositsile-lebo-mashile-don-mattera-and-phillippa-yaa-de-villiers-to-tour-the-uk/>

⁷⁴ <http://consciousness.co.za/the-innerview-of-lebo-mashile/>

In the anthology *No Serenity Here* (2010)—the title of a poem in which Kgositsile is candidly critical of democratic South Africa’s afrophobia and exclusivity from the rest of the continent—he is involved as both writer and mentor. The anthology is “created by 26 poets from 12 countries on the continent of Africa” (2010, Preface: 1), and composes of “African poetry in Amharic, English, French, Arabic and Portuguese”, and is also translated into Mandarin. Kgositsile’s experience with the Afro-Asian Writers’ Organisation lent a transnational and global south frame to this project. He was honoured with the degree Doctor of Literature and Philosophy (DLitt et Phil) by the University of South Africa in 2012. In his acceptance speech he encouraged an ongoing pursuit of knowledge that “can never be for its own sake; it must be used as an instrument to enable us to be instrumental agents of our historic mission, which is to create a better future for the majority”⁷⁵. In pursuance of the need to celebrate the national poet laureate, the ‘Keorapetse Kgositsile Annual Lecture’ was inaugurated by the wRites Associates in partnership with the National Library of South Africa in 2013. Kgositsile continues to be a public figure as South Africa’s foremost poet, and reads his poetry at events around Johannesburg area, where he stays. He still travels to the U.S. when invited to give talks at universities, and enjoys contributing to the think tanks who are involved in innovation and transformation in the arts and culture sector of government.

Kgositsile’s literary biography demonstrates how his life and work can be seen as metonymies for vital cultural and political revolutions in the twentieth century, to date. His poetry responds to the changing landscape of his times in illuminating ways. The role of and relationship with Setswana in his life and work cannot be over-emphasized. He is heir to a rich culture of gifted orators in the form of his grandmother and mother, who have instilled in him a valorisation of Setswana indigenous knowledge and culture as superior knowledge to that of English, and sown as a philosophy determination to always find continuity and fluidity between Setswana and anywhere he ends up in his life. Setswana therefore is represented in his work as a point of departure, and as a mobile, dynamic, productive and generative resource.

⁷⁵ <http://www.unisa.ac.za/news/index.php/2012/09/poet-laureate-keorapetse-kgositsile-lifelong-education-is-key/>

Chapter Three: Setswana *Roots* and Genealogies

Is it possible to work within the black Atlantic framework without necessarily granting *routes* priority over *roots*? That is the intervention of this chapter. In Keorapetse Kgositsile's work we can see an example of *roots* and oral traditions remaining alive and being reinvigorated, providing a resource that is then carried across the Atlantic and renewed in translation, rather than left behind and ossifying. His relationship with Setswana language and literature, as well as other southern African oratory practices, complicates and enriches scholarship on Africa's relationship with its diaspora. I repudiate the bifurcation of roots and routes often uneasily poised in debates on (non)essentialism, and join Harry Garuba in rejecting that binarism by proposing a model that "simultaneously foregrounds Africa in a non-essentialising manner and recognises the trajectories and transformations occasioned by the itineraries of history" (Garuba, 2010: 240).

This chapter responds to Gilroy's rejection of "roots", which he identifies as referring to "the structures of nation state and constraints of ethnicity and national particularity" (Gilroy, 1993: 19). The prioritising of black Atlantic cultural and political movements, arts, books and ideas as productive of a counterculture to modernity tends to relegate Africa to the anterior of that modernity. Kgositsile's work in the U.S.A, which was shaped by the memory, gnosis, imagination and collective wisdom of southern Africa, expands Gilroy's description of modernity and incorporates "roots" in its making. Kgositsile's oeuvre shows how African oral traditions and indigenous literary forms become productive, generative and transformative in his work published in black diasporic print cultures and periodicals. In this chapter I propose and employ a model that tracks how those indigenous forms are drawn upon and mutate in Kgositsile's work.

In his book *Strategic Transformations in Nigerian Writing* (1997) Ato Quayson "demonstrates the continuity that African literature written in Europhone languages has with indigenous sources" by focusing on four Nigerian writers. He concurs with and builds upon Abiole Irele's premise that there is an "elaboration in literature of a continuous stream of collective consciousness, from the traditional to the modern" (1997: 6). Irene further argues that the writers who appropriate from the indigenous resource-base are not unconscious slaves, but, informed by a highly self-conscious artistic agenda, transform what they appropriate. From this observation Quayson is able to study the "strategic choices exercised

in filiation with indigenous conceptual resources”, thus providing theoretical tools useful to this study. He observes that the “interrelationship between orality and literature renders the term ‘intertextual’ as fragile” because “the semiotics of a culture does not always require prior textualization” (1997: 16).

As Quayson aptly points out, indigenous resources-bases are “constituted not just by representative oral and written texts, but also motifs, symbols, ritual gestures and even unarticulated assumptions” (ibid). As such, he proposes the term “interdiscursivity [...] to describe the discernible relationships that inhere between literary texts and a field of conceptual recourses” (ibid). Quayson acknowledges that the text cannot “be seen as a mirror of discrete cultural elements but rather [as] the *prismatic* field of interactions between cultural discourses and literary ones” (ibid; my emphasis). He adopts the term ‘prismatic’ from Alain Viala (1988) to account for “an inter-semiotic space [that] is not of the literary text as reflective surface but as an arena of [...] ‘prismatic effects’” (Quayson, 1997: 16). The discussions of the relationship between Kgotsitsile’s literary texts and a myriad of indigenous conceptual resources will benefit from the notions of “interdiscursivity” and “prismatic effects”.

Quayson sees the strategic literary formations that deploy indigenous resources more as a will-to-identity than a will-to-power (1997: 17). In his conception, “a will-to-identity yields a simultaneous concern with the African nation-state as the implicit horizon, the political unconscious of the literary enterprise as it were, as well as a concern with projecting a viable identity outwards into the global arena” (ibid). It should be stated from the onset that Kgotsitsile is by no means tribalist or invested in the “fictions” (Kgotsitsile, ‘No Serenity Here’, 2010) of nation-state created in 1884. His “will-to-identity” is explicitly politically and culturally tied to land that is not interpellated by colonial design. Its implicit horizon constitutes a myriad of cultural discourses that include Setswana language and literature, as well as southern African textual and oratory practices. Similarly, its political horizon stretches to the rest of the African continent, as well as its diaspora, embracing a pan-African identity. Quayson aptly observes, “it is possible to discern in [such literary texts] a constant concern with the processes of nation-state formation in both direct and indirect ways, revealing an imaginative sensibility that has the political horizon as an important defining signified” (ibid). The will-to-identity seeks to forge spiritual coherence as one moves out of one’s social language practices into the global arena. Kgotsitsile’s politically conscious

literary agenda is undergirded by that will-to-identity, as has been discussed in the previous chapter.

Harry Garuba's paper 'Roots and Routes: Tracking form and history in African diasporic narrative and performance' (2010) is concerned with Africa's relationship with its diaspora. On the one hand there is the Afrocentric position that locates Africa as origins "by way of anthropological verification and corroboration, while the other tends to erase it in the name of an anti-essentialist articulation of hybridity and creolisation" (240). The "Afrocentric, nativist, anthropological model" therefore finds itself in an uneasy binary tension against the Black Atlantic model. That is to say the paradigms of roots and routes are often set in binary opposition of one another. Garuba rejects this binarism by proposing a model that "simultaneously foregrounds Africa in a non-essentialising manner and recognises the trajectories and transformations occasioned by the itineraries of history" (ibid). For these purposes he deploys the concept of "genre" because "genre criticism is more concerned with identifying 'a principle operative in a number of texts' (Todorov, 1975: 3) or practices than in nailing them down to an originary ground temporally specified and territorially bounded" (Garuba, 2010: 245). "Genre" is in effect congruent with "interdiscursivity", as they repudiate an originary text that would be reflected, mirror-like, in the strategically transformed literary texts.

Garuba proposes a model that is effective in tracking the mutation and transformation of genre in Kgositsile's poetry. The model tracks the strategic transformation of indigenous resources into a multiplicity of archives. I take the term 'archive' from Brent Edwards which he defines it as a "generative system", "a discursive system that governs the possibilities, forms, appearance, and regularity of particular statements, objects, and practices [and] 'determines what can and cannot be said'" (ibid). In his *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (2003), he identifies the language question as one of the "necessary misrecognitions" of diasporic discourse in transnational black solidarity marked by "adversarial internationalizations" (Edwards, 2003: 7). He argues that "it is not possible to take up the question of diaspora without taking account of the fact that the great majority of peoples of African descent do not speak or write in English" (ibid). As such he concludes with the assertion that "the cultures of black internationalism can be seen only in *translation*" (ibid; original emphasis). He further proposes that we can approach the project of translation "only by attending to the ways that discourses of internationalism

travel, the ways they are translated, disseminated, reformulated, and debated in transnational contexts marked by difference” (ibid; original emphasis). Edwards repositions language as a central question in black internationalism and urges us to see diasporic cultures as undergirded by translation, which begs of us to pursue the difference marked by varying trajectories of travels.

Garuba’s ‘Masked Discourse: Dramatic representation and generic transformation in Wole Soyinka’s *A Dance of the Forest*’ (2002) proposes a model to historicize genre and map its mutations and transformations, through a set of ‘archives’: the primary archive, secondary archive, and tertiary archive. In this chapter the primary archive will constitute Setswana oral traditions—praise poetry, naming, riddles, proverbs, legends, myths, folk tales—and other forms of southern African oratory practices. Most importantly, the wisdom of the collective will be shown to be transformed by Kgositsile and routed to across the Atlantic through the secondary and tertiary archives. The manner in which the Setswana oral traditions go through processes of transformation into historical dramas, poetry, novels, short stories and so on, as embodied by the corpus of Setswana classics Kgositsile carries over the Atlantic and back, constitutes the secondary archive. Here Kgositsile’s literary mentors who transform the oral into the literary text in southern Africa will be explored to situate him in a lineage within which he writes. Kgositsile’s collections of poetry are an elaboration of the collective stream of consciousness, from the oral to the literary. Those constitute the tertiary archive, and prompt us to unearth the primary and secondary archives in order to map the ways those discourses travel, are translated, disseminated and reformulated.

3.1 *Primary Archive*

This section focuses on oral traditions that constitute Kgositsile’s *roots* and the archive of the collective consciousness. It will function to track the developments and mutations of certain Setswana oratory statements and forms, and will track how they are strategically transformed in his poetry. Kgositsile’s positioning in relation to the Setswana language, and other southern African oratory practices have been noted in the literary biography chapter, and this section will focus on the specifics of the collective wisdom, how they function in those cultures, their forms, characteristics, and social values. To reiterate, by oral traditions we refer to praise poetry, naming, proverbs, storytelling, riddles, legends, myths, and folk tales. I

will have four subsections that will focus on the first four features, while they are also shown to be co-constitutive with the rest (at least in Kgotsitsile's poetry).

3.1.1 Praise Poetry

Praise poems form a chief part of oral traditions in southern Africa, and reflect the cultural values of the community's collective consciousness. In Setswana they are called 'maboko' and are held in high esteem by that culture. They carry varying features from culture to culture, but are threaded by consistent characteristics: they are "emotional short-hand" (Vilakazi in Canonici, 1996: 226); that is, they are truncated odes of veneration, pride, narratives of conquest, lineage, and at times of criticism. They are "usually allusive, metaphorical, compressed, 'cryptic and aphoristic', with single lines often recalling 'the balanced structure and the gnomic brevity of proverbs', as well as richly symbolic (Coullie in Brown, 1999: 72-73). Through these features, the southern African praise poem can be seen to function at the epistemological nexus of art and pedagogy: as "a form of education, an instrument of social adjustment, an expression of a sense of values, a historical record, a communicative strategy, a means of social control, and a cultural index" (Molwa, 1975: 13). This nexus would prove to be very attractive to Kgotsitsile, whose cultural agenda has "no choices beyond didactic writing" (1976: 35). In his *Places and Bloodstains* (1975: 20), he published the following poem:

Son of Mokae

When you open the eyes and say tha
You will say where is the son of Mokae
Bring the bones rootmen
The rootmen say they have fallen like this and like this
There he is he is gone he is gone son of Mokae
Even the oceans he has crossed by planes
The artificial birds of the europeans
He says he is running nowhere he is not fearer-of-enemies
He does not fear europeans bringers-or-war
The evil fools who took our land by force
He says he does not fear them even with nails he could rip them up

There he comes the son of Mokae
 Manchild fighter-of-war who is sharp is hot
 He is not without being pepper
 The war is on young men where are you
 Where are you when son of Mokae is looking for you like this
Poet leave him alone you have praised him
You have praised him without knowing his name
His name is spear-of-the-nation

This poem represents Kgotsitsile's active appropriation of the genre, form, style, and features of praise poetry. The title of the poem is itself a literal translation from Setswana, "ngwana-Mokae" or "morwa-Mokae", which is the way one would be identified in the community—through their surname, which would in turn point to a family within the community, and open up a whole lineage. It is noteworthy to mention that a surname is referred to as 'seboko', and a praise poet, 'seboki'. The root word in all three is to point to surnames being central to the praxis of praise poetry, and even reveal that in naming, you create poetry. This is also true of many southern African cultures:

It may also be pertinent to point out that surnames have a different connotation for the Nguni (Zulu and Xhosa) and Sotho (Tswana, Pedi and Sotho) speakers. In the Sotho cluster, a surname is seboko, and in the Nguni cluster it is called isibongo. The root of these surnames is found in praise names, so that each family must have a praise poem dedicated to it. Praise poets, in turn, are called sibongi/seroki. Thus we understand that 'praise poems' (now generically called isibongo/dithoko) of the kind embodied in surnames, were a significant means of identifying the individual, the family, the clan and the extended family and in this way served as (auto)biographical sites of the clan (Raditlhalo [PhD thesis], 2003: 71).

When we consider the role of naming as a chief feature in Kgotsitsile's poetry—almost all his poems are dedicated to a named individual—we start to understand that the name is co-constitutive of the poetry. That is the topic of the next section on 'naming'. In that self-translated title of the poem, Kgotsitsile cites the surname of Zakes Mokae, South African-born American actor, to bring to our attention a specific geographical locus—southern Africa, through the Sotho/Tswana surname—to sing praises of those who "are not fearer-of-enemies"

and who do not fear “europeans bringers-of-war”. This way Mokae is synecdochal of anti-colonial freedom fighters on the continent (“*his name is spear-of-the-nation*” refers to uMkhonto we Sizwe, the ANC’s armed wing), as well as those who are fighting in the diaspora—“he is running nowhere”. This is a foremost feature of praise poetry: that it is communal and multivocal. By rooting his poem in this tradition Kgositsile is pointing to the past as generative and transformative. History can reveal a way forward, and he seems to suggest that “the evil fools who took our land by force” can be defeated as they have been in the past. The praise poem becomes symbolic of a historical record as well as a cultural index, intricately entangled.

Through this praise poem, which Kgositsile initially wrote in Setswana and translated into English (in email exchange, 27 October 2014), the pedagogical aspects are demonstrated. History is recorded, and southern African cultural practices mutated and transformed onto a diasporic platform: by beseeching the “rootmen” to “bring the bones” and divine over the whereabouts of son of Mokae, Kgositsile employs the services of traditional healer, whom he refers to as “rootmen”, a term that resists the associations of tradition as conventionally polarised with modernity, and ultimately also resist the essentialist identity of those healers, polarised between roots and routes in diasporic studies. In this poem, the services of the “rootmen” are transformed from southern Africa to the diaspora, and function as the counterculture of modernity. The “bones” that are thrown in a way that a *sangoma*, or traditional healer, would onto his mat, often made of goat skin, carry whole cosmologies of the individual, family, clan, society, community, nation, and of the land (devoid of colonial cartography). The bones “fall like this and like this” in this poem, revealing the history and future of the subject, Mokae, who is one with the people. The history represented in the bones harks back into the lineage, re/calling the deeds of the ancestors:

Praise poems do not need to convey a linear, quantified sense of history in which causality and secularist logic predominate because in unadulterated South African cultures there is no scission between knowledge and belief, the secular/material and the religious, as there is in settler culture...The hailing of the subject in praise poetry thus carries with it a significance beyond an obvious social recognition. The subject of the poem is defined, identified, recognized, named adjectivally for living auditors and for the ancestors. The subject is situated in an almost unpunctuated stream of time, from the past of the ancestors to the future generations who may invoke the subject through

the performance of the praises. The whole subject – physical, psychological, and spiritual – is hailed. A person is not construed in terms of the Western separation of technologies for mind and body and soul (represented in the largely incompatible and highly specialised disciplines of psychology, medicine and theology). Individual southern cultures conceive of being as a continuous state (Coullie in Raditlhalo, 2003: 75).

It is that conception of being as a continuous state that informs the title of Kgositsile's first collection, *Spirits Unchained* (1969), which is subtitled *Paeans*, or songs. The songs are praise poems which Kgositsile went to the extent of recording on a cassette tape that supplemented the collection, emphasizing the oral and aural nature of those poems. The first line of 'Son of Mokaé' appeals to the reader's ear as much as it does the eyes—"when you open the eyes and say tha"; the word "tha" carrying a geographical signifier of the South African greeting 'heitha', shortened. The exclamatory word "tha" begs to be enunciated for it, for in its written form, it lies latent. "Tha" is a greeting, but it is also a protest revolutionary song whose call-and-response praxis infects the word with multiple layers of meaning. In the protest song the caller shouts "heithaaa", and is met with a response of "tha! tha tha!", and in a circular motion the song goes, lending its rhythm to the dance that also became a standard dance for the ANC's armed wing uMkhonto we Sizwe (MK). This song and the greeting are appropriated from the primary archive of southern African oratory practices and movements. Movement here is particularly important as it connotes both the dance to the protest song, as well as revolutionary movements such as FRELIMO, MPLA, ZIPRA, and ANC. Jeremy Cronin tells us that struggle southern African songs "are old warrior songs, church songs, which had previously been old ritualistic songs transmuted into Christianity, then into protest songs, then into worker songs and so on"⁷⁶. Whatever their genealogy, they embody a full vision of activism oriented towards a future Africa.

3.1.2 Naming

Praise poetry and naming are twin forces. In Setswana, Sesotho and Sepedi, the word for 'name' is 'leina', whose root word is explained by Credo Mutwa as related to the concept of

⁷⁶ <http://webpages.dcu.ie/~sheehan/za/cronin02.htm>

the “Ena” (1969). In southern African cosmology, an individual is understood to be composite of the body, mind and soul, as well as an *ena*. The *ena* is the ancestral spirit, or the spirit double, which informs the naming of the child: the conferring of ‘leina’. Most names survive generations, as every generation is named after the previous one to ascertain continuity. In Nguni languages, when you refer to self as ‘mina’ you encompass all those features of a self, including *ena*, in the root word. This is also true of ‘nna’, self, in Tswana/Sotho/Pedi. Therefore ‘leina’, or name, conjures the presence of the person’s *ena*. Coullie aptly observes, “in indigenous South African cultures, to call out someone’s names is to conjure their presence. Names are not merely labels which refer to someone [...] they *are* their referent”; that is to say “the name is that person. They are the same, the name and the person” (in Brown, 1999: 75-76). Therefore, in the act of naming Kgositsile conjures and performs a genealogical vector that ties the past with the future.

The following poem ‘After Mongane’ employs the concept of the *ena* (Mutwa, 1969: 179) to appease the spirit of Mongane Serote and those of the South African Student Organisation (SASO), Black People’s Convention (BPC) and MDALI, to whom Kgositsile’s fifth collection *Places and Bloodstains* (1975) is dedicated:

After Mongane

I
I aspire to sound
leaning on a million
wretched voices I
I am this eye
jumping straight
out of dolphy out of
the sweetness of this pain
open like a mother’s thigh
openly I tell you
we are a sacrifice
we are blood of new birth
we do not need tears
openly I tell you I

I am this eye
when you hear guns
my poem will be that sound
hammered to heat of action
in the sweetness of pain

This poem is informed by Kgositsile's time spent with Mongane Serote in the U.S. from 1974 till Kgositsile's departure from in 1975, and by stories from 'home' told by Serote. Naming plays the foremost function of honouring their camaraderie. In invoking his first name, 'Mongane', or 'friend' in isiZulu, Kgositsile conjures his presence. Serote's retelling of the horrors of township living under the fascist apartheid government, and the formation of BCP, SASO, and MDALI as counter-insurgency more than inspired Kgositsile—he got possessed by that spirit and made the pledge: "After Mongane I, I aspire to sound leaning on a million wretched voices I, I am this eye". The repetition of eye can be read on many levels. I, self, is 'nna' in Tswana/Sotho/Pedi, whose root word is 'ena'—"we believe that a human being [...] has an Ena. This can be translated quite simply as a self. In the Bantu languages, myself is *mie-ena*, usually shortened to *mina*"⁷⁷—and is here congruous with the "eye", which signifies the spirit self. So there are three presences here: the first "I", second "I", and the "eye"—the body, the spirit double, and the spirit. The body is Kgositsile and his *ena*; the spirit double is those of Mongane, BCP, SASO, and MDALI; and the eye is the spirit of "a million wretched voices".

The root word *ena* is in 'nna' (me), *ena* (him/her), and '*bona*' (them); all of whom are co-constituents of self as a communal 'motho' (self). The philosophy of 'botho' or 'ubuntu' states that 'motho ke motho ka batho', which expresses the interconnectedness of the whole. Therefore the leitmotif⁷⁸ of "eye" signifies 'to see them', or to 'bona' 'bona' (see them), the suffering of the whole (bona/them) reflected in the eye, and hence the soul. Re-membling the interconnectedness of black suffering, Kgositsile conjures the spirit of alto saxophonist and all-round jazz musician Eric Dolphy (line 7) to conjoin the spirit of 'bona' (them, those South African liberation movements) and 'ena' (him/Dolphy, synecdochal of diasporic Africans) in the diaspora. The refrain "we are ... we are ... we do not ... we do not ..." is

⁷⁷ Mutwa C. *My People*. Penguin Books: 1969, pp 179

⁷⁸ The leitmotif of the "eye" is also deployed to in the poem 'For Eusi, Ayi Kwei & Gwen Brooks' (1971: 73), as a strategy to transform the 'ena' onto a diasporic platform.

unison ‘rena’ (we/us), root word to ‘Morena’—Setswana for god—which Kgositsile also makes reference to in the poem ‘My name is Afrika’: the need to fight for our liberation so that “we are gods of our day and us” (1969: 20). The Tswana/Sotho/Pedi men refer to each other as ‘Morena’—god—in recognition self and higher self. The Nguni use the word ‘nkosi’ for similar purposes. This knowledge and perception of self in relation to community finds continuity from the collective wisdom of southern African cosmologies.

The act of naming in Kgositsile’s poetry therefore also plays the role of immortalizing his subjects by casting them in the theatre of continuity in the circle of life. When we interrogate Kgositsile’s use of naming in all his poetry, we see the relationship between collective cultural narratives and individual narratives which always signify shared history, and the potentiality of a shared vision for the future. Michael Titlestad aptly observes that, “recovering subaltern biographies is unavoidably to dwell on the seam at which identity is stitched to history. [...] Names are metonyms for both the life-stories of individuals and collective cultural narratives; they stand for shared histories. To recover these elided lives is to initiate the potential for cultural recovery” (Titlestad, 2014: 191). From the primary archive Kgositsile learnt that regression is not desirable or possible, and therefore the heroics of ancestors should not only be celebrated in naming them during their praise songs, but also through decisive action that fosters continuity throughout generations.

Collective history presupposes collective responsibility, and collective desires—a formidable identifying vector from the past into the future. Kgositsile addresses his grandmother in the short story ‘The Favourite Grandson’: “Once [...] you said that every natural loss results in some gain; the way of nature’s balance, you said it was” (*Black World*, November 1972). From this wisdom of the elders Kgositsile understood that when an ancestor dies, nature restores balance by creating a rebirth that will ensure continuity. This is the reason southern Africans name children, as an obligatory ritual, after elder generations and those who have departed. This praxis informs Kgositsile’s resolve, “I’m names that in dying for life make life surer than death” (1975: 14). This paradox expresses the sentiment of continuity, where the heroic deeds of the dead inform a way forward. In the poem quoted above, the lines “I am this eye / jumping straight / ... out of / the sweetness of this pain / open like a mother’s thigh / ... / we are sacrifice / we are blood of new birth”, epitomizes those workings of balance in nature that Madikeledi imparted on Kgositsile. He understands that the sweet pain is that

every new birth is accompanied by blood; that in dying life may be possible. Madikeledi's wisdom was transformed to political resistance through the trope of naming.

Through naming Kgositsile recovers histories and shared stories, unearthing and articulating archives. Two examples stand out, namely, the reference to his mother as "woman dancer of steel" (transformed strategically through translation from her Tswana totem *mosadi-mmina-tshipi*), and calling South African communist party giant Moses Kotane "Seaparankoe".

Totems are also key features of praise poetry that derive from the ritual of poetry that accompanies the naming of an individual, particularly after rites of passage. Totems contain elements of praise and usually compare the qualities of an individual with objects or phenomena from the natural world. Kotane's totem is "one who adorns leopard skin", bequeaths him with royal and brave qualities. Only members of royal families wear leopard skins in southern African societies. The issue here is not whether Kotane is from a royal family; Kgositsile elevates him and his deeds to royal position and his brevity and 'art of war' is celebrated by being compared to a leopard. A "dancer of steel" implies that his mother is strong, valuable, solid, and unbreakable, but also flexible, dexterous, and beautiful. A totem therefore is also a term of endearment. To refer to one using one's totem is to truncate one's praise poem into a phrase during speech act, and to simultaneously summon one's presence and strength to embody yours.

3.1.3 Proverbs

Proverbs, like idioms, are gleaned from communal regimes of truth that inform the society's values. In the introduction of *Things Fall Apart* (1958) for instance, Achebe tells us, "one catches glimpses of the glory of Igbo oratory by listening to the few people remaining in the villages who can deploy the full resources of the language. The good orator calls to his aid legends, folk-lore, and proverbs of his people [...] proverbs serve to give universal status to a particular incident [...] they are called [...] 'the palm-oil with which words are eaten'". By generously using proverbs in his oeuvre, Achebe therefore considers himself a good orator. Proverbs are speech acts harnessed to the maximum in Setswana too, as they are repositories of wisdom, cultural values, philosophies and even prophecy.

In the opening lines of his essay 'Malcolm X and the Black Revolution: The Tragedy of a Dream Deferred', mourning the death of Malcolm X, Kgositsile opens the lament by quoting

a Setswana proverb: “a Motswana doctor throws his bones and when they tell him of an irretrievable loss he will say:

‘Se ileng se ile
Se ile mosimeng, motlhaela-thupa
Lesilo ke moselatedi’”

He translates the proverb as thus, ‘what is gone is gone / it has gone down the hole, the-unreachable-by-rod / the irrational (i.e. the unwise and ill tempered) is he-who-follows-it’” (Kgositsile, in *Negro Digest* November 1968: 42). The Motswana doctor in this context represents the collective wisdom and reminds us of the “rootmen” who “bring the bones” in the poem ‘Son of Mokae’. A Motswana doctor is being routed from ‘roots’ to come and divine over black pain. He helps Kgositsile seek and make sense of his devastating sense of loss—the primary archive is cultivated to make sense of the present. In that oral archive he finds vocabulary to soothe his own pain, reverting to traditional wisdom through that proverb. It is customary to comfort others or offer advice by posturing, “the wisdom of the elders says [insert proverb]”, or “our ancestors said [insert proverb]”, *et cetera*, in order to root the comforting words of advice in a lineage, affirming that they have stood true through the test of time. Kgositsile leans on this communal truth in this fashion throughout his poetry.

Proverbs extend to sayings with which old people used to conclude extraordinary narratives. In the poem that laments the events of the Dakar festival of 1966 (FESMAN), discussed in the previous chapter, Kgositsile ends that elegy with the following lines:

manchild, said the Tswana
Sage, marry your mother and
Bear yourself your own brothers
Because a thing don’t mean
A thing if it don’t move (1971: 43)

The origins and nature of southern Africans is marked by migration and movement. It is believed that through moving you learnt about yourself and the world. That is why, as expressed in a later poem,

To wander, the ancients say,
Is to see (1990: 30)

The original poem in Setswana is ‘go tsamaya ke go bona’, which encourages, like the above wisdom, the necessity of not limiting your worldview to one form of knowledge system. By routing these proverbs beyond their geo-specific locale, Kgositsile shows how they reflect a universal truth. He states that “life is / an unfolding proverb / woven around / the desire of the memory / of the belly dance / ... / translated memory rides / past and future alike” (1971: 23-24). The following translated memory from the Tswana/Sotho/Pedi archive helps Kgositsile to see the struggle of diasporic blacks as a different site of the same struggle of (South) African black on an internationalist perspective:

These are the words
Of an ancient dancer of steel
—the children of a person
share the head of a locust— (1971: 23)

The original proverb states that ‘bana ba motho ba kgaogelana tlhogo ya tsie’, and is from what is known as ‘Dikgafela’—the first fruit harvest and thanksgiving celebrations. Here the proverbs emphasizes the virtue of sharing what you have with the community, informed by a relational identity where ‘motho ke motho ka batho’, relating to communality in the collective consciousness. This concept is the one that premises lack of single authorship over these stories, songs, and wisdoms. These proverbs signify shared communal experiences as in the following example,

What had the ancients observed
When they said of cattle
When I lack it
I have no sleep
When I have it
I still lack sleep (1990: 23)

The above centrally situates the value of cattle for the community. Cattle were and continue to be a sign of status and wealth, and a man who lacks cattle loses sleep over his poverty, and

one who has cattle loses sleep over the safe-keeping of it, as they, by custom, are released from the kraal daily to go feed on the countryside. Most of the wars in the history of these settlements were cattle disputes. Whole judicial systems were put in place to settle these.

The following proverb speaks to the notion of appearance versus reality,

As the ancients say
When the clouds clear
We shall know the colour of the sky (1990: 24)

The colour of the sky cannot be discerned while the clouds are still gathered. Here Kgositsile was referring to the end of apartheid's reign and anticipating a new era of democracy. The future of South Africa could not yet be told during the euphoria around the political parties being unbanned and political prisoners released. It is also a warning to not count chickens before the eggs hatch. It highlights the timeless wisdom of the ancestors and makes universal their message. The primary archive provided him with both an idiom and a worldview, which enable him to write poetry that simultaneously celebrates the dawn of democracy while issuing a warning about the future, as seen in the poem 'Dumalisile' (1995). Kgositsile reminds us that there is nothing that can come about without decisive action,

The ancients say
Fruit is not a thing
Of the instant
Neither is a happy home (1990: 28)

This wisdom from the primary archive is routed to a poem 'From now on (For Debbie and Oscar)' written for newlyweds, and using ancient wisdom to warn them that marriage is not only made of happy and positive experiences; there will be a need to do the work of planting the seed and nourishing it together in order to enjoy its fruits. As shown in these examples, Kgositsile respects the full resources and utility of language, and views the older generation as granaries from which future generations can eat, lest they cultivate that resource: "poetry is necessary. Any society needs it as much as it needs food. [...] If we look at our older languages, isiZulu, Setswana, Xhosa and so on—they are spoken by old men and women who have never seen the inside of the classroom, but their everyday speech is much more

poetic than anything English could ever produce. The respect for creativity with language with these people is enormous, and it is built into the culture and embodies the cultural values of the collective” (Makube, *City Press*, 7 November 2004). Kgositsile reveres the poetry in his people’s everyday speech, and as a poet, that is for him fertile ground to pick the fruit and return the seed of the fruit to the earth for posterity.

3.1.4 Storytelling

Storytelling through folklore and legends is the culmination of all oral traditional forms and how they are preserved. The narrative of lineages, movements of people, their encounters, deeds, defeats, triumphs, and their way forward are recorded through stories, legends, mythologies, and folklores are all shared and passed down from generation to generation through storytelling. The genealogy of the people may be revealed through what Kgositsile calls “memories of tales told by the fireside” (1969: 57)⁷⁹. Consider Kgositsile’s poem ‘The Gods Wrote’:

We are breath of drop of rain,
Grain of seasand in the wind
We are root of baobab,
Flesh of this soil,
Blood of Congo brush, elegant
As breast of dark cloud
Or milk flowing through the groaning years

We also know
Centuries with the taste
Of white shit down to the spine...
...
The music of our laughter reborn
Tyityimba or boogaloo, passion of
The sun-eyed gods of our blood
Laughs in the nighttime, in the daytime too

⁷⁹ In Kgositsile’s short story ‘Ab/original mask’, discussed in the next section.

And across America, vicious cities
Clatter to the ground. Was it not
All written by the gods!

‘The Gods Wrote’ is at once a subversion of the value system placed on literacy and literary texts by the colonial forces, as well as an assertion of long standing lineage in the form of a self-reflexive praise poem. Kgositsile notates both the story of his genealogy and a praise poem from the oral tradition to transform them from their relegated margins to the centre of knowledge production. This poem is a retelling of the story of how the southern Africans ended up where they are today, geographically. Mathole Motshekga also retells this story as part of his Kara Heritage Institute indigenous knowledge platform:

African people in southern Africa came from the Area of the Great Lakes known as Tamera or Kumara (i.e. the Land of the Moon). The heart of this land was the island of Ukafa in Lake Nolutubaale (now Victoria). The name Ukara means the Land (u) of the Spirit (ka) of the Sun (ra). [...] The indigenous people of the Land of the moon and sun were called Bakara (i.e the people of the Sun). [...] The name Africa derived from Afura, another name of the Area of the Great Lakes. [...] The name Afura and its variants mean the land (A, za, sa or so) of the king (Fura or Faro) perceived as the sun or god. Thus the names Afura and its variants mean the Land of the king, sun or god. The word Afura of Afar is the root of the name Afuraka [...] Afuraka means The Land (A) of my (ka) king (fura) who is perceived as the Sun or God. Thus the name African means the child or person of the Sun, God or the King i.e. a divine or royal child or person. [...] All southern African people trace their origins to the upper Nile or Area of the Great Lakes. The wars of conquest and slave trade [by the Arab and Portuguese] drove these people to the south (Motshekga, 2007).

Kgositsile is appropriating from this narrative of origins in his poem ‘The Gods Wrote’, which relates the collective “we” to the protracted land that stretches from the Congo all the way south, as well as north, beyond the Atlantic (“the sun-eyed gods of our blood / laughs ... and across America”). The images of the land, the spirit and the sun are central to that poem, and consequently are leitmotifs in his poetry. The land—“we are the flesh of this soil”—is perceived as part of the identity and physical manifestation of the collective. The spirit is the “breath of drop of rain”, and the “grain of seasand in the wind” connected to that land: there

is the whole sea in a grain of sea sand as there is the whole sea in a drop of rain. The implications are that there is the soil or land in an individual, and there is the whole lineage in an individual's drop of blood. The sun is the gods, the kings who are now ancestors, who are "of our blood". His family name means 'the king has arrived' in Tswana, leads him to the question "was it not all written by the gods!". This way, the anti-colonial wars against "centuries with the taste of white shit down the spine" are not only necessary, but are pivotal in the project of restoring one's place in divinity or royalty. Identifying oneself as defined by the trinity of land, sun, and spirit, which is the meaning of 'Afrika' or 'African', is to identify oneself as a seamless extension of the land. This is informed by the story of migration from central Africa, which forms part of the primary archive. A later subsection titled 'People of the sun', in the discussions of the tertiary archive, will show how Kgotsitsile is conscious of this 'story of origin', and gleans rich symbols and vocabulary from it. The next section shows how Tswana writer, Leepile Raditladi strategically transformed the imagery of "sun-eyed gods of our blood" from this primary archive in his drama *Motswasele II*, which Kgotsitsile carried with him across the Atlantic when he was exiled.

3.2 *Secondary Archive*

This section focuses on Tswana literary texts that were transformed from oral resource bases, and in turn influenced Kgotsitsile's writing. When he was instructed by the ANC to go into exile he packed, with his meagre belongings, his "most valuable movable property"—his collection of Setswana classics. This corpus included some of the first published books in the Setswana language, including LD Raditladi's dramas *Motswasele II*, *Dintshontsho tsa Lorato*, and his poetry collections *Sefalana sa Menate* and *Boswa jwa Puo*; DP Moloto's *Motimedi*; P Leseyane's *Moremogolo wa Motho*; and DPS Monyaise's novels. The most important for us in this section is Raditladi's *Motswasele II*, whose imageries, language, plot, and heroics inspired Kgotsitsile's penning of the poem 'Towards a Walk in the Sun'. Most importantly, the affinities between their biographical lives are striking, and would have led Kgotsitsile to naturally find inspiration in Raditladi's resolve to fight back an unjust regime as well as his handling of language.

3.2.1 *Morua kgomo and the Collective Consciousness*

Leepile Raditladi's *Motswasele II* is a historical drama published in 1945, and chronicles real-life rule of king Motswasele (circa 1823) of Bakwena who was a power hungry, hard-hearted ruler; unjust with an insatiable hunger for sovereign power. The history of Bakwena tells us that Motswasele and Moruakgomo were fighting for the throne of the Bakwena royal dynasty (Schapera, 1965: 43). In Raditladi's historical drama, king Motswasele II is accused of being "a dictator, an autocrat and totalitarian leader, who ruled with a heavy hand, took people's possessions without their permission and punished people without recourse to courts of law" (Matjila, 2009: 10). He helped himself to other men's wives, particularly his own advisors' wives, and would expel them from his royal place if they complained. His behaviour and reign of terror sowed instability and strife in his village so much so that the community rallied behind Moruakgomo, a member of the royal family, to usurp Motswasele II and take over as rightful king. Moruakgomo's qualities demonstrated respect for the collective goals of the community, and he was a brave and kind visionary.

The parallels between Raditladi's life journey and that of Kgotsitsile are profound. Raditladi was born in 1910 in the village of Serowe⁸⁰ in Botswana, and descended from the Ngwato royal family through an internal marriage on the maternal side of his family (Matjila, 2009: 3). He was also the great-grandson of Sekgoma I and his seventh wife, making Raditladi's grandfather Kgama III's⁸¹ brother (ibid). As such Raditladi stood chance to ascend the throne in 1923 when Kgama III died⁸², and was succeeded by his son Sekgoma II, who died after serving only two years. Since the heir of the throne, four-year-old Seretse Kgama, was too young to ascend the throne, his uncle Tshekedi Kgama became the regent, or custodian of law and order. This position of power rendered him power hungry and eyeing the throne. He saw Raditladi as a threat since Raditladi was heir to *bogosi* (kingship). He then "accused Raditladi of being the father of the new-born child of [...] Tshekedi's wife", considered tantamount to treason. Tshekedi banished Raditladi from Serowe even when the commission of inquiry proved that Raditladi had no sexual relations with Tshekedi's wife. He completed *Motswaselle II* in 1937, and it was originally titled *Serukutlhi*, which translated to 'rebel', and "the manuscript was rejected on the grounds that it was an alleged personal attack on

⁸⁰ Bessie Head's three important literary works are set in Serowe, namely, *When Rainclouds Gather*, *Maru*, and *A Question of Power*. She lived in exile from South Africa in Serowe as a refugee from 1964, and spent fifteen years there before she could obtain Botswana citizenship.

⁸¹ Kgama III, fondly known as "Kgama the good", was one of South Africa's most powerful *dikgosi*, of kings. Setswana historian, SM Molema's history called him "one of the greatest Africans that ever drew breath. The history of the Bamangwato nation is the history of Kgama's life" (Molema, 1920: 53-54).

⁸² He was immortalised by Bessie Head in her Kgama novel *A Bewitched Crossroad: An African Saga* (1984).

Tshekedi Kgama”⁸³ (Matjila, 2009: 18). Raditladi’s experience of being exiled by Tshekedi is narrated in *Motswaselle II*, and both Raditladi and Kgositsile model themselves on the drama’s protagonist, Moruakgomo, tasked with overthrowing the autocratic king and fighting fascist regimes that exiled them.

Moruakgomo’s measured and poetic language throughout the drama harnesses the rhythms and sounds of Tswana orality, and capitalises on alliterations and internal rhyming inherent in the language. Compared to king Motswasele’s commandeering and rigid speech act befitting an autocratic leader, Moruakgomo’s well-thought and passionately expressed speeches and monologues sets him apart from the king as an ideal leader. He exhorts the community into action against the king through using parables, folklore, and references to historical events, never using the ‘I’ pronoun but always speaking through the collective voice of the Bakwena. His leadership qualities are strengthened by his regard for strong communal ties, as demonstrated in the opening scene of the historical drama:

Rra, tsatsi jaanong le wela ka **kgala**
Bosigo bo tla bo suma bo tswa **kgakala**,
Bo **ikala** le boatlhamo jwa lefatshe
Jaaka mosadi a ala phate fatshe.
Jaanong ke nako ya dinaledi go **rena**
Pele ga mohumagadi, ngwedi, a **rena**.
Bakwena ba re Motswasele ga se kgosi, modipa,
O tlhoka o ka mo phunyang ka lerumo dimpa;
Ba batla ke dira, ke ba direla **serena** (Raditladi, 1945: 3).

Rra, the Tswana address to a man, is directly linked with ‘ra’, of the sun, or the ‘sun god’ (Ramasedi), which underpins the relating to one another as ‘morena’, or god, between Tswana/Sotho/Pedi men. In this powerful dialogue with Molotlhanyi, councillor of king Motswaselle who also comes to complain about his rule, Moruakgomo speaks in metaphorical language above, which translates as, “Rra, the sun is sinking below / there is

⁸³ According to Ranamane (in Gerard, 1993: 171), “it is interesting to note that the rejection of the manuscript was based, not on its literary merits, but on personal issues and material circumstances. The manuscript deserved to have been published because it had won a literary award in 1935”. The officials of the Protectorate even state that “any manuscript would fail simply because it was written by L.D Raditladi” (Peires, cited in Matjila, 2009: 10).

darkness descending on us from afar / measuring the expansive breadth of our land / like a woman spreading her blanket on the ground. / it is now time for the stars to alight / to usher our great matriarch the moon. / The Bakwenas moan that Motswasele is not an honourable king / they need someone to puncture his stomach with a spear / they chose me for the deed, to restore their dignity”. Delivering very important news that will set the scene for the rest of the drama, Moruakgomo uses mythical language to speak of the events of their community. The sun is “sinking” means ‘the king is to be toppled’, creating darkness to descend; it is now time for the stars to come alight and usher in the matriarchal moon means the children (stars) and women (moon) must be protected. This pretext prepares the ground for the planting of the big news: ‘we have a dishonourable king who brings disrepute and strife, and we have to kill him’.

This opening monologue is rich in Tswana orality and aurality through the use of rhymes—“kgala”, “kgakala”, and “ikala”; “lefatshe”, “phate”, and “fatshe”; “rena”, “rena”, and “serena”; “modipa” and “dimpa”—and also uses the “bo” repetition in lines two and three to gather together, in a melodious fashion, the effects of a riddle to pre-empt a serious issue as one does not just attend to the heart of the matter from the onset without displaying linguistic dexterity to the attention of his listeners. Images of the sun, moon, stars, skies, and land scaffold Moruakgomo’s speech act, and this cosmology is drawn from the Africans’ stories of migrations south, where the integrity of the land (A), spirit (ka) and the sun (fura/king)—or Afuraka—must be restored and protected. Moruakgomo says he has been chosen for this honourable task “go ba direla serena”, or ‘to make them gods of their days’, as Kgositsele translates in the secondary archive, or to restore their divinity.

The chief centrality of land to the identity of the people is constantly relied on in Raditladi’s drama to garner collective vision. In the following scene three of the king’s messengers start to suspect that the king’s leadership is flawed and potentially dangerous for the community. Motswasele ordered them to kill Moruakgomo, the protagonist and morally upright member of society, as Motswasele suspects that he is sowing discontent in the hearts of the people, which may incite violence against him:

Motswasele:

...

Fa lo le batho ba me ba ba nkutlwang,

Gonne ke itse sentle fa lo nkutlwa,
E re ka moso, Moruakgomo, lo mmolae.

Morongwa 2:

Kgosi, a tiro ya rona jaanong ke go bolaya batho?

Motswasele:

Ga go na lobaka lwa dipotso. Tsamayang!

Morongwa 2:

Re a tsamaya, Kgosi.

(Baa tswa)

...

Morongwa 2:

Fa ngwedi e ka nnela go metsa dinaledi
Ke gore legodimo le ka sala le ntse jang?

Barongwa botlhe:

Le sala le le lobala, e bile le le lentsho.

Morongwa 2:

Tiro ya dinaledi mo loaping ke eng?

Morongwa 3:

Fa ngwedi a sule go sala go phatsima dinaledi;
Fa ngwedi a ka emela go metsa dinaledi lefifi le ka
nna legolo,
Ya nna lefifi la “ntshwarela ngwana ke ale”.

Morongwa 2:

Ahaa! Lefifi le legolo bogolo,
Le tau e ka jang motho a sa e bone.

Ba-ga-etsho, ga ke re lo utlwile puo ya Kgosi?
Re tshwanetse ra bolaya nngwe ya naledi tsele.

...

This conversation between three of Motswasele's messengers creates a dramatic turning point in the narrative. Motswasele appeals to them to kill Moruakgomo the next day, to show their allegiance. Messenger 2 then asks, "but king, is it our duties to kill people now?"; to which Motswasele retorts, "there is no time for questions, just go do it". They take his leave. The second messenger asks a provocative question to other messengers, "if the moon swallows the stars, how will the skies look"? All three answer unanimously: "the skies will be a vast nothingness, and furthermore, very dark". The second messenger continues in his provocation, "what is the function of the stars in the skies"? The third messenger responds in a way that saves the second messenger the dilly-dallying: "if the moon 'dies' then the stars will be left to brighten the skies; if the moon can swallow the stars then the darkness that follows will be intense. It will be the 'hold the child whilst I blanket the ground with my loin cloth' kind of darkness". The second messenger appreciates the third messenger's candour and continues, "Ahaa! The darkness would be intense and all-encompassing. Even a lion would be able to eat a person without him/her seeing the lion. My people you have heard the king's demands. He demands that we kill one of the stars"; and in this speech he continues to assert his humanity in the face of the king's demand; that he is unable to be a thoughtless killer. All three messengers agree that if the king wants to kill, let him be the one to do it.

The messengers cross path with Moruakgomo shortly after their discussion and alert him of the king's intentions. Not only do they let him know they were sent to kill him, they now pledge to protect him and support him in his brewing plot to usurp Motswasele. The place of collective aspirations and strength is here worth noting. The messengers are not mindless properties of the king. They are driven by a collective vision of restoring their land to its former glory. This kind of solidarity and commitment to overthrow an unjust king would have been very attractive and inspiring to Kgosisile. Their shared vision to be gods of their days is the reason Moruakgomo would be able to address his people with a language that appeals to their honour code and commitment to foster continuity with the land of their ancestors. Moruakgomo addresses the community:

Lefatshe la rona le senyegile.

A lefatshe la rona la mogolo!
 Le sentswe ke rona beng ba lone,
 Ditshaba di tlile go le gapa.
 Letsatsi le letsatsi go elela madi,
 Ngwaga le ngwaga go nna dikgang
 Tse re sa itseng tshimologo ya tsone.

Above Moruakgomo bemoans: “our land is disintegrating before us; the land of our ancestors! We are solely responsible for its demise; and other nations/villages will seize it one day. Day by day blood flows on this land; year by year there is war; whose origins we are not privy of”. His approach and tone are measured and respectful, addressing men who still have their land and must take decisive action to rise and fight against anyone who threatens its harmony—land being the most valuable property as it enfolds their continuity from the past into the future. Moruakgomo’s success is the success of the collective. He is able to use this call to action to plan an execution-style killing of Motswasele with the help of his men. At the end of the drama Moruakgomo cold-bloodedly spears the king to his untimely death. Moruakgomo’s final words to the king are,

Lerumo la me le tla ipala magale,
 Le tla go sogotlha mmele jaaka podi
 ...
 Lerumo la me le batla wena ole esi.
 Fa o sa sie, nna ke tla go leleka,
 Ke tla go gasa ka ntwaga ya masokgwa,
 Ke go ruta fa mothonyana a na le mokgwa,
 Fa ka lerumo le ene a ka go leka.
 ...
 [Motswasele, speared, drops to the ground]
 O baa o ntsha lolame jaaka noga,
 O utlwa tshipi e go sega lobete!
 Seganka ga se ile go bolawa.

Moruakgomo announces to the dying king, who is facing the former’s spear, that his spear, hot like embers, will ravish the king’s body like a mealie-cob; that his spear hungers only for

the king. He wants to show the king that those who threaten their well-being must necessarily meet their fate at the point of a spear. After spearing Motswasele Moruakgomo sends him to his death with these parting words: “your tongue is hanging out like that of a snake / feeling the hot steel of my spear piercing through your organs! / even a king is not exempt from being slain”. This brave and decisive action by the community to restore their dignity and land inspired Kgositsile. The figure of the spear is very important as Kgositsile adopts it, carries it forward beyond the Atlantic and fashions himself a modern day Moruakgomo, getting ready for anti-colonial/Jim Crow/apartheid war with a vision to put a spear in the stomach and hearts of the oppressor, ending the period of darkness. This will be demonstrated in detail in the next section.

3.3 *Tertiary Archive*

This section tracks how southern African oratory practices and literary texts are transformed in the tertiary archive of Kgositsile’s oeuvre. It will initially focus on how Kgositsile strategically transformed Raditladi’s *Motswasele II* in his poem ‘Towards a Walk in the Sun’, but also show how the diverse range of all his influences, from orature of the south to that of Afro-America, as well as literary texts from both places, come together in this poem. That will show how roots, or material from the primary and secondary archives, are not left to ossify, but are carried over, and strategically transformed through translation, beyond the Atlantic, and used as a resource for diasporic cultures. A final subsection shows a myriad of influences from indigenous and literary sources in Kgositsile’s other poetry.

Kgositsile’s poem ‘Towards a Walk in the Sun’, first published in the Black Arts Movement’s “bible” (Sam Anderson, 2014) *Black Fire: An Anthology of Afro-American Writing* (1968), strategically transforms the tropes, images, and thematic concerns of Raditladi’s *Motswasele II* in a milieu of anti-apartheid, anti-colonial and anti-Jim Crow wars. The title of his poem ties in the primary and secondary archival material discussed, as it alludes to walking away from darkness, or as Moruakgomo would put it, from the setting sun where darkness is descending. ‘Towards a Walk in the Sun’ also brings to the fore the sun as related to the land and its people. The name African, as Mathole Motshekga elucidates, “means the child or person of the Sun, God or the King i.e. a divine or royal child or person” (Motshekga, 2007). This ‘ancient’ wisdom that Kgositsile makes reference to through his

fictional Sun Valley in his 'Ab/original Mask' (1969), discussed in the next section, is what informs the prologue of 'Towards a Walk in the Sun':

THE WIND IS CARESSING
THE EVE OF A NEW DAWN
A DREAM: THE BIRTH OF
MEMORY

The birth of memory is spawned by desire, from which the memory dawns. In the relationship between memory and desire in Kgositsile's poetry, memory is the doorway to ancient wisdom, which is used here to bridge the past and the future. The memory therefore divines the eve of a new dawn. Drawing from nature just like Moruakgomo, he uses grand themes from nature and dramatic language to lure and caress the attention of his listeners. It is not unlike Moruakgomo's opening lines of his dramatic monologue, functioning to pre-empt serious dialogue, but also promising positive outcomes in the use of images from nature, whose character is dual: after darkness is light, and after night is dawn. Images and metaphors from nature tend to make universal a specific event, and Kgositsile appropriates them to speak to both sides of the Atlantic. The reader 'hears' a voice of heroics, informed by the collective, addressing the community and charged with prophetic overtones in this poem, which decisively derives from what Kunene defines as features of an "African poet" (Kunene, 1992). The language of the prologue also reads as an oral speech act. Whenever Kgositsile uses uppercases as above, he signifies both an intersemiotic space, and speech act; that there is an/other language(s) or text(s) being inferred.

The prologue matches the epilogue in style, tone, influence, and form. In the epilogue he calls-and-recalls the collective memory to fashion a battle cry in the dramatic that remembers that of Moruakgomo:

THE WIND YOU HEAR IS THE BIRTH OF MEMORY
WHEN THE MOMENT HATCHES IN TIME'S WOMB
THERE WILL BE NO ART TALK. THE ONLY POEM
YOU WILL HEAR WILL BE THE SPEARPOINT PIVOTED
IN THE PUNCTURED MARROW OF THE VILLAIN; THE
TIMELESS NATIVE SON DANCING LIKE CRAZY TO

THE RETRIEVED RHYTHMS OF DESIRE
FADING
IN-
TO
MEMORY

The first and last stanza of the long poem correlate: they are the only parts in uppercases in that long poem, which functions to signify Moruakgomo's monologue. Similar to Moruakgomo, Kgositile identifies a problem by drawing from natural phenomena, then using that monologue as preamble to the decisive action of puncturing the marrow of the villain with a spear. Kgositile declares that the wind that is caressing the eve of a new day is here, and there shall be no more art talk and no more poems; the only poem will be the spear punctured in the marrow of an unnamed villain. Moruakgomo's resolve to restore the community's integrity and honour, as well as 'to make them gods' ("ke ba direla serena") again, by spearing Motswasele in the stomach finds resonance here. The wind has already caressed the eve of a new dawn, and for Kgositile the time is here for the community to stand together and usurp white supremacy. He proposes that they pivot the marrow or hearts of those regimes with spear points.

Kgositile's intersemiotic influences are varied. The spear is not only from *Motswasele II*, but also recalls the ANC's military wing uMkhonto we Sizwe (MK), Zulu for 'spear of the nation'. The reason for the unnamed villain is the function that the spear assumes on both sides of the Atlantic. The spear immediately conjures traditional fighting images, which speak to Raditladi's drama. To ensure the protraction of his battle-cry, he also makes an intersemiotic reference to Richard Wright's novel *Native Son* (1940) as well as Afro-American vocabulary "dancing like crazy". This is his way of not only expressing solidarity between the pan-African struggle against white supremacy, but to also to speak with a thunderous voice that speaks directly to the hearts of the affected people. He speaks their language in order to appeal to their collective action. The alliteration in "the **spearpoint** pivoted in the **punctured** marrow" is central and onomatopoeic, resounding decisive attack and hitting of the target.

This dramatic monologue rendered with a heroic African voice declares the end of poetry and calls for revolutionary action. A troupe of four Afro-American performers responded to that

call, “therefore we are The Last Poets of the world” (Oyewole, 2014: xx), surrendering to the call to arm themselves with spears and be conscripted to war. And that is how they coined their name and that of their debut eponymous chart-topping album (1971). Just like Moruakgomo, Kgositsile armed his people with spears and charged them with incendiary and fire brand temperaments. The body of this poem is discussed in the next chapter as an open source, or a resource-base, from which The Last Poets gleaned most of their imagery, language, and battle-cry. The body of ‘Towards a Walk in the Sun’ will be juxtaposed with that groups’ poetry/lyrics to demonstrate that they did not only coin their name from this epilogue, but were also influenced by this poem in their eponymous album.

3.3.1 People of the Sun

Poetry as a form can tend to, through the diligent economy of words, truncate whole narratives and histories. This is certainly the case with Kgositsile’s poetry. Sterling Plumpp observes that Kgositsile’s poetry is “inherently complex” (Interview 1, 2014) as it derives from many varied experiences, heterogeneous histories and knowledge systems. His short story ‘Ab/original Mask’, one of the few he has written, published in the *Negro Digest* of October 1969 reveals Kgositsile’s investment in the history of southern African migrations from central Africa. If his poems mystify the Bantu migrations narrative, then this story demystifies it in a manner that points to the primary archive and postures that archive as a resource that has been transformed through translation.

In ‘Ab/original Masks’ a woman called Balese meets a diasporic man called Reaitse on a winter’s night in snowy New York City. They fall in love, and start a peculiar type of relationship where Reaitse, Tswana for “we are the knowers”, or “we are the ones who know”, is always critical of Balese (Tswana for “leave them behind”). Reaitse believes that Balese is “running”, and that “the best thing you’ve got going for you is that you have not lost your mask but it is walled in” (55). The reason for Balese’s disconnect is that “you doubted your parents’ teaching. But you would not question them. Instead you exiled yourself to Europe. You doubted Europe’s humanist. You doubted Western values. But you were afraid to question history. So you exiled yourself into negritude. You stopped straightening your hair and started raving about Egyptian civilisations, Songhai empires and Zulu warriors of old. But that was still running” (54). Balese seems to be an American-born Tswana; born to exiled parents. She has a Tswana name but has not engaged her parents

about her history and identity, hence she is not aware of her mask or her 'ena'—her spirit that links her to the people of "Sun Valley": the land of the sun/god/king, also known as Africa (Afuraka). When they meet she asks him where he is from:

Where are you from? She asked him [...]

Sun Valley, he said, Sun Valley, seemingly more as a reflection than as an answer to her question. "A long time ago your tribe did too. That's where your mask comes from. [...] The mask was never a reproduction of the human face; in the mask the face was transfigured to enable men to delve deeper into inner man. In their language, also, the people never spoke directly about a thing, they spoke around it so that it stood out more clearly" (1969: 56-57).

The definition of the mask here refers to the spirit self, or the 'ena'. The mask is aboriginal to Reaitse, and original but elusive to Balese. Balese's people come from the Sun Valley, where such knowledge would have been valued enough to be recorded and passed on from generation to generation, to ensure that the mask is in constant affinity with the face: that the 'ena' is part of the 'nna'. It seems Reaitse is grappling to speak clearly about the mask because it is a mystical part of self that cannot be reduced to language. He mentions that such a thing as the mask would not be spoken of directly but in a round-about way so that it may not lose its meaning through reduction. This is certainly a way of speaking that is characteristic of the southern Africans, as has been noted in the case of Moruakgomo speaking worldly about the sun, moon, stars and metaphors of darkness before he could state the point: the king has to be killed. This is the way of the people, and Balese, whose name presupposes that she is disconnected to her people, makes her frustrated with Reaitse's way of speaking and turn of phrases in the short story.

The Sun Valley is tied into Reaitse's identity. It is co-constitutive of the land, the sun, and his *ena*. It is what makes him a god. He tells Balese,

"Some day I'll take off to the sun with my son. He loves to play with the sun."

"How come?"

"He believes he's a god like the sun" (1969: 59).

The place of the sun here is Sun Valley, or Africa, and particularly southern Africa, whose cultures and languages are the result of the Bantu migrations as explained by Motshekga earlier. That land is what can restore Reaitse's identity as a "god like the sun". The mythification of reality in Kgositsile's poetry is informed by the dynamic relations with the natural world considered to be living, which informs how the language never speaks directly about a thing, but speaks around it so it may appear clearer. He elucidates this language in an internal monologue Reaitse has after Balese leaves him,

No, Balese, I am not at war with you. All I'm saying is, when you mistake artificial light for sunshine, you are in danger. [...] When things don't jive together, when you can't dance and even the air sticks a poisoned finger at your song, it is time to create new wombs for a rebirth and come bursting out on the other side of time, dancing laughter out the wilderness (1969: 58-59; my emphasis is non-italicised font).

Once again the glossing of this monologue in the short story points to a different knowledge system from an/other place, language, and history. The images of the sun, song, fire, dance, womb, rebirth, and restoration of 'godliness' (serena/Morena) are all related and in contradistinction with those of ice/icebergs, and cold in a number of Kgositsile's poems: "my people no longer sing"⁸⁴; "[my generation] never learned the power of fire"⁸⁵; "though we don't do the soildance anymore"⁸⁶; "sing wombs, life needs / a new mother. Sing wombs, / bursting with specific life. / Weave a song with a movement / to celebrate the act you fathered"⁸⁷; "impotence"/"castration"⁸⁸, slaves, and "niggers"⁸⁹ (as opposed to "deniggerfied" gods), respectively. Reaitse accuses Balese, "sometimes you try to sound worldly and *cold*", meaning that she often tries to be European or Western (1969: 54; my emphasis).

Reaitse explains to Balese that "some day another tribe had come in from the sea. They had imposed their gods and their traditions on the people of Sun Valley. They had cut up the land as they pleased, deposed the kings of the Valley and held the Sun Valleyians in bondage. And

⁸⁴ 'My people no longer sing', 1971: 31

⁸⁵ 'The new breed', 1971: 72

⁸⁶ 'Mystique', 1974: 9

⁸⁷ 'No tears in the tide', 1971: 63

⁸⁸ "You too deballed grin", from 'Towards a Walk in the Sun' (1971: 65); and "ball of transparent pus where the manhood used to be" (1971: 86).

⁸⁹ 'Notes from a sanctuary', 1971: 88

now we laugh less and less⁹⁰, [...] and you do not even have memories of tales told by the fireside” (1969: 57). These tales told by the fireside are reinvigorated in this self-reflexive short story, and serve to breathe life into what the ancients said, and reaffirm Kgositsile’s identity on the other side of the Atlantic. He asserts in ‘The Long Reach’ (1971: 71) of the “tree whose roots have defied death”,

Do you know then how
Old is the spirit
Whose roots are heart in the depths
Of Afrika; branches clasping the skies
In continents where the eye blazes
Like spears of gods!

Kgositsile affirms that his spirit, or his ‘ka’, is still rooted in Afrika even when the branches of that tree are in other continents. In spite of this, the eye—the ‘ena’ or ‘spirit self’—still blazes like spears of gods, that is, like the spears of the Sun Valley, of the kings, and of the gods. In a sense the character of Balese is a warning against disconnectedness through lack of storytelling (signalling continuity), which kills the fire from the sun, and consequently walls in one’s mask or *ena*. These images of sun, song, dance, womb, rebirth and other side of time are pervasive in Kgositsile’s poetry, and point to roots, to storytelling, to indigenous archives, and to the transformative nature of those archives. This short story is of pivotal importance to his oeuvre as it may be considered to provide a narrative instantiation of why it becomes necessary to walk towards the sun.

3.3.2 Praise Poetry as Vehicle for Diaspora Consciousness

In *Spirits Unchained* (1969) Kgositsile ‘sings’ the praises of liberation struggles leaders and cultural workers in Africa and its diaspora in poems that are shaped and governed by the enunciability of oral praise poetry. Through cultivating the rhythms, styles, forms, and oral practices of southern Africa, he is able to firstly use the past to make sense of the present in the moulding of the future, and secondly, to bring these struggles and their movements in affiliation and solidarity; him standing “between memory and desire”. He recorded these

⁹⁰ In ‘Tropics (for Melba)’ the poem concludes with “forever beginning / from ice to sunlit bush / forever laughing” (1971: 30).

praise poems as a supplement to the collection. The poems are dedicated to Amiri Baraka, Malcolm X, Nelson Mandela, David Diop, Rap Brown, Nina Simone, Patrice Lumumba, Frantz Fanon, Aime Cesaire, A.B. Spellman, Max Stanford, Nqabeni Mthimkhulu, and Lindsay Barrett. The poem 'Elegy for David Diop' is an example of the primary archive's pivotal function across the Atlantic,

He who thinks immortality
Flaming with furious fidelity
Could be dead has no head
You are the indignant air
Carrying fruit to nourish the continent
Unrelenting throbbing of the continent's heart
You are the dance and the dancer
The concrete foundation and the builder
Moving at lightning speed
Mating with fertile future
Refusing the touch of the stench
Of the carcass of rancid europe
I saw you explode
In Sharpeville burning
In Watts and the paddies
Of Vietnam and all dawn
Long I the desert palm
Drinking from your spring
Danced to the elegant
Replenishing of your majestic fire
Roaming the rhythms of your eternity
Because you are not man
You are what Man should be
Eternal like the Word

This poem bears all features of a praise poem and is oral in nature, finding better expression when read out loud, as Kgositsile did in a recording on the cassette tape. The first three lines set the tone and style of the poem, setting the spirit of praise in motion by eliciting attention

from the reader, and luring them into the enchanting characteristics of the subject of praise. The first three lines at once subvert the form, style, and nature of a British traditional elegy by energising the audience out of mourning into celebrating: “he who thinks immortality flaming with furious fidelity could be dead has no head”. Kgositsile here commences with a communal voice charged with heroics. Es’kia Mphahlele deems his voice “an expression of a sense of flux of life extending from a past that is reckoned in relation to one’s ancestral heritage” (Mphahlele, 1979: 34). To address Diop “you are the”, twice is a feature that emphasizes the immortality of his subject of praise. Diop is worthy to be praised because he has entered the realm of those, although having perished in physical form, whose spirits live on unchained so that to die is to live in the multitude of spirit that nourishes the continent; can be both the dance and the dancer; the concrete foundation and the builder. A spirit that is unchained defies space and time, and can move at lightning speed from Sharpeville in South Africa to Watts in California to Bandung in Asia, mating with fertile futures that repudiate the stench of Europe’s rancid carcass.

The sense of flux of life that Mphahlele points out is in the form of history experienced in its manifolds in the moment of penning a paean or reciting it. From the oral archive he appropriates epithets as salient features of praise poetry—you are the indignant air, the dance and the dancer, the spring, and the majestic fire that roams eternally. The sustained energy of praise and language that borrows from nature—air, fruit, heart, lightning, mating, fertility, desert, palm, spring, fire, man—embodies much of African oral poetry that you hear carrying “resonances of an intensive sense of absolute organic unity in the universe: man, not alone in the universe but unique in the rhythm of being and in harmony with other men, with animal, natural phenomena and so on” (Mphahlele, 1979: 34). These are qualities deserving of praise; that the subject has harnessed a rhythm in his life that is in harmony to that of his fellow men, ecology, cosmology and natural phenomena. This fosters a particular relation where the spirit is not separate from the physical, where there is growing dominance of the spiritual dimension over the physical, enabling the elegy to be celebratory instead of sombre. There is a sense of duality through the image of fire that here function not only to ‘cremate’ the physical body to unchain the spirit, but also to fire up the struggle against white and Eurocentric domination. The epitome of this praise poem is embodied by the last three lines—you are not man / you are what Man should be / eternal like the Word—charged with Evangelism not of the colonial make up but of a superior spirit whose beginning has no end like the word.

The influences of Setswana oratory and literary practices, those from other parts of southern Africa, as well as those from diasporic cultural practices all confluence in his poetry in ways that simultaneously complicate and enrich the ways in which current scholarship understands the relationship between Africa and its diaspora. In the process cultivating all those influences, Kgositsile is able to bring them together through what Ato Quayson calls the inter-archive, which accounts for the “discernible relationships that inhere between literary texts and the field of conceptual resources” (Quayson, 1997: 16). For example, in the poem ‘When Brown is Black’, written for the leader of Students Nonviolence Coordinating Committee (SNNC), Rap Brown, he also uses the stylistics and language transformed from oral praise poetry to rhetorically ask, in the form of praise,

...

Are you not the fist
which articulates the passion
of the collective power of our rebirth
Are you not the fist
of the laughter of the rhythms
of the flames of our memory

...

The naked head of the fuse
is up in the air pregnant
with the flaming children of our time

In this poem to SNNC leader Rap Brown Kgositsile draws parallels between SNNC and ANC through the image of “the fist” which is an intersemiotic signifier that represents the black power movement (including the Black Arts Movement) in the former organisation, and is a symbol for *amandla*, or power, in the context of the ANC. The fist represents unity, and embodies the fire within unchained spirits. That fire is collective and is redemptive, holding promises of endings that will give way to beginnings (rebirth). *Amandla*, a word that is at once a noun, a verb, and a call that elicits incendiary response, fires up the masses—it is a naked fuse that flames up children of our time—and articulates the passion, the laughter, the rhythms and flames of memory as lived experience. Here Kgositsile uses the praise poem form as a vehicle for diaspora consciousness. In the previous poem to David Diop we see

Sharpeville and Watts finding commonalities, and representing “the stench of the carcass of rancid europe” whose greed and imperialism at the time culminated in the Vietnam War. SNCC stood very strongly against the enlisting of African Americans in that war, and sought to educate the black community in the perils of fighting for a country that regards you as a second class citizen.

3.4 Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that it is possible to work within the Black Atlantic framework without necessarily granting priority to *routes* over *roots* through the work of Keorapetse Kgositsile. His work demonstrates that granting priority to *routes* comes at the cost of neglecting Africa’s position in his memory, imagination, and creative processes; similar to neglecting the principal function of a tree’s roots in the formation, growth, and production of that tree. This oversimplification of the diasporic experience presents a lamentable bifurcation of the continent and its diaspora, and consequently continues to posit oral traditions of Africa in a mythical past: un-generative, un-transformative, and passively collecting dust in a time capsule. Kgositsile’s oeuvre and his relationship between memory and desire demonstrates that African oral and literary forms are not left behind in the distant past, but are entangled in the ongoing (re)production of collective memory shaping his ongoing ‘becoming’. The praise poem form’s longevity, for example, has been shown to be a vehicle for diasporic consciousness. As such, the binary positioning of *roots* and *routes* is complicated and destabilized by his work and relationship with the African diaspora.

Chapter Four: Setswana *Routes* and Trans-Atlantic Interlocutions

Africa on the continent and
Africa in America exist
interwoven in my work
(Kgositsile in Rowell, 1978:
31).

It is a striking fact that the African-American revolutionary poetry outfit and purported grandfathers of rap ‘The Last Poets’ coined their name from Keorapetse Kgositsile’s poem ‘Towards a walk in the sun’. This came from a classic case of call-and-response, with Kgositsile’s battle-cry ‘calling’ for the end of art and poetry, and beginning of armed liberation war. To this looming dying era of poetry, the group ‘responded’ by proclaiming, “therefore we are *The Last Poets* of the world”. Kgositsile’s call is an incendiary wakeup call to revolutionary action. Its form, poetic, rhythms and tone are strategically transformed from a Tswana text, L.D Raditladi’s *Motswasele II* (1945), which he carried with him across the Atlantic Ocean when he left South Africa. The Last Poets heeded that call and fashioned themselves as a militant revolutionary movement that would inaugurate social consciousness through music.

This chapter’s main intervention is to demonstrate multivalent streams of influences between black South Africa and black America, as opposed to the current one way exchange in scholarship that almost always presents black South Africans as emulators and mimickers of Afro-American culture. This objective will be reached through an investigation into Kgositsile’s poetry and how it trans/figures both Afro-American literary and musical history. Kgositsile’s interlocutions with Afro-American literary history will be illuminated through his involvement with the Black Arts Movement (BAM), taking up Margo Crawford’s provocation to study Kgositsile’s “deep immersion in the [BAM]”, “the larger significance of his presence in *Black Fire*”⁹¹, and “his Black Arts and post-Black Arts publications by Third World Press” which will all reveal that “the story of black diasporic relations during the [BAM] is only beginning to unfold” (Crawford, 2007: 119). The neat and simplified packaging of BAM as Afro-American, which Gilroy deemed the “counterculture to modernity”, has spilled over into the geopolitical flaws of Gilroy’s Black Atlantic. I argue

⁹¹ *Black Fire: An Anthology of Afro-American Writing* (1968) is the BAM’s bible, edited by Larry Neal and Amiri Baraka.

that the fundamental issue is the contradistinction between *roots* and *routes*, which are here uneasily poised in a binary tension between Kgositsile and BAM. What happens when the binary collapses, and when roots confluence with routes; that is, when Africa on the continent is interwoven with Africa in America?

Kgositsile secured his place in the history of Afro-American music through his interlocutions with The Last Poets, a New York City-based revolutionary rap crew that coined their name from Kgositsile's poem 'Towards a Walk in the Sun' which appeared in *Black Fire*; and further modelled their work on Kgositsile's poetry that was revelatory to them in its clarity of vision for a decolonized Africa. The Last Poets are purported to have birthed rap music, which has evolved into a core component or element of Hip Hop culture that is known today largely as an Afro-American-spawned black expressive culture. This chapter strives to point to southern Africa as one of the sites of the origins of rap.

I take as a point of departure Gilroy's description of the Black Atlantic as "the *stereophonic*, bilingual, or bifocal cultural forms originated by, but no longer the exclusive property of, blacks dispersed within the structures of feeling, producing, communicating, and remembering" (1993: 3; my emphasis). This chapter that so explicitly strives to emphasize the crucial participation of South Africa in the "counterculture of modernity" through literature, music and other exchanges therefore benefits from Tsitsi Jaji's notion of the 'stereomodern' which frames the discussion on "cultural practices that are both political and expressive, activated by black music and operative within the logic of pan-African solidarity" (Jaji, 2014: 14). Jaji attests to pan-Africanism's reinvigoration as an ongoing viable theoretical potential. This heuristic approach helps to release the trans-Atlantic black cultural exchanges and diasporic processes from the limited Black Atlantic scope, by focusing on the pivotal role music played in pan-Africanism and the circuitry of music it engendered.

For these purposes, this chapter will commence with Kgositsile's relationship with BAM, demonstrating its shared commitment to music as a productive, transformative and generative resource for culling a black aesthetic. The '*Black Fire* moment' will be both a point of departure and a point of return in this chapter, as we move from that 1968 publication, backwards to map the lineage of the black expressive tradition, coming back to it in order to trace the trajectory of that tradition moving forward, through Kgositsile's cultural heirs. Therefore the first section will focus on the interrelationship between BAM's anthology

Black Fire and *The Last Poets*. That 1968 moment will be followed by a mapping of the evolution of black expressive cultures from African oral traditions. This will be followed by focusing on *The Last Poets*' lyrics/poetry, particularly focusing on how Kgositsile's poem became their resource base in an articulation of stereomodernism. Then through that stereomodern relationship I will explore how that birthed the consequent era of rap, post the *Black Fire* moment, which evolved into hip hop in both black America and black South Africa. This evolution will show how hip hop fostered jazz as a poetic, which in turn cultivated spoken word in South African post-1994 hip hop featuring Kgositsile, all understood as practices that express the black cultural continuum on both sides of the Atlantic.

I focus on interlocutions and tran-Atlantic influences between black South Africa and black America in the wake of Stephane Robolin's troubling observation that, "South African reception in the transnational interface remains the predominant focus within the vast majority of available comparative studies", but "the striking paucity of scholarship that considers the influence of black South African cultures on black America could very well lead to the lamentable conclusion that the dissemination culture, in this case black America, remains unaffected or unaltered by transnational transaction" (Robolin, 2012: 88-89). It is this lamentable situation that I seek to remedy through the figure of Kgositsile.

4.1 *BAM, Black Expressive Cultures, and Trans-Atlantic Interlocutions*

The Black Arts Movement (1965 – 1975) was, according to Kaluma ya Salaam, the only American literary movement to advance "social engagement" by breaking from the immediate past of protest and petition (civil rights) literature and "dashed forward toward an alternative that initially seemed unthinkable and unobtainable: Black Power"⁹². Understood as "the second wave of the Harlem renaissance" (Anderson interview, 2014) and the "aesthetic and spiritual sister of the Black Power concept" (Neal, 1968), BAM members found in 'Africa' a "unified body image that seemed to heal the traumatized legacy of kinship haunting the post-slavery landscape" (Crawford, 2007: 112). Members such as LeRoi Jones, Don Lee, Rolland Snellings, and Paulette Williams, in denouncing their "slave names" looked to Africa to proclaim their identity as "Africans", and changed their names to Amiri

⁹² <http://www.english.illinois.edu/maps/blackarts/historical.htm>

Baraka, Haki Madhubuti, Askia Toure, Ntozake Shange, respectively. Alongside these changes were adornments of dashikis, acquiring African commodities, spotting afros (the mood of the time is captured in the article ‘Big Bushy Afros’ by A.B. Spellman), and searching for a long-lost heritage of Africa. Kgositsile’s membership in that movement meant that he embodied the ‘Africa’ with which they sought to construct their identities.

Different historical sources on the BAM report different members, but in most the key players are Amiri Baraka, Eldridge Cleaver, Jayne Cortez, Harold Cruse, Hoyt Fuller, Nikki Giovanni, Maulana Karenga, Etheridge Knight, Haki Madhubuti, Larry Neal, Ishmael Reed, Sonia Sanchez Ntozake Shange and Quincy Troupe⁹³. Some articles are apprehensive to name Kgositsile as a core member. However, in his article ‘Any Day Now: Black Art and Black Liberation’ Larry Neal (*Ebony Magazine*, 1969) cites Kgositsile as constitutive of black arts literature from BAM, as does his feature in the anthology *Black Arts: An Anthology of Black Creation* (1968), introduced by Kgositsile, and edited by Ahmed Alhamisi and Harun Wangara. Historian Sam Anderson has called Kgositsile the “centrepiece of the Black Arts Movement” (Interview, 2014), as has Crawford; “by 1968 [Kgositsile] had become one of the central poets of the Black Arts Movement” (Crawford, 2007: 113). Further, in 1968 Kgositsile’s set of three poems appeared in the seminal anthology for the Black Arts Movement (BAM), *Black Fire: An Anthology of Afro-American Writing* (1968), edited by Amiri Baraka and Larry Neal. Understood to be the “bible” of the BAM, *Black Fire*’s subtitle could have contributed to the uneasy inclusion/exclusion of Kgositsile in the mainstream history of BAM, caused by the slippage between signifiers such as “negro”, “black”, “African”, and “African-American”, as Crawford aptly observes (2007: 113).

The slippages in the title, *Black Fire: An Anthology of Afro-American Writing* (1968) are inherent in three signifiers—“black”, “American” in Afro-American, and “Afro-American”—which form linguistic and semiotic traps. The movement represented a pivotal period in the African-American literary tradition when Africa became a prime metaphor in the repudiation of western heroic narratives of conquest. It is articles such as the one that appeared in *Time Magazine* of October 1994 titled ‘Black Creativity: On the Cutting Edge’, coupled with the semiotic slippages around BAM’s identity throughout history, that have absconded further critical analysis of BAM’s identity, and simplifying it as African American: “sometimes

⁹³ <https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/text/brief-guide-black-arts-movement>

referred to as ‘the artistic sister of the Black Power Movement’, the [BAM] stands as the single most controversial moment in the history of *African-American literature*—possibly in *American literature* as a whole”⁹⁴. When he arrived in New York City “at the coalface of the ferment of cultural and political revival in Harlem”⁹⁵ Kgositsile found a “hole” in what was determined to become “whole”—BAM’s quest for cohesive identities—and his immersion in and layering of the ‘whole’ interfaced his exile from South African apartheid with crises that shaped the U.S. Black Power and Black Arts Movements (Crawford, 2007: 118). In essence, Kgositsile’s presence in the BAM lent/learned it an internationalist perspective. Literary scholar Sterling Plumpp recalls that

Kgositsile had a tremendous influence on spoken word poets and script poets because of the clarity of his vision with respect to politics, social change and struggle. He possessed a deep understanding of the global process of decolonization. He was a member of the ANC and had participated in struggle. The examples of his political analysis and poetic texts became models of how one committed artist could struggle to affect an imaginative committed vision of social change (email exchange, 2 April 2015).

Kgositsile’s political analyses and poetic texts became to the BAM and his progenitors what Richard Wright’s *Black Boy* and *Native Sons*, as well as Langston Hughes poetry was to him in his early years. It was these two authors that opened Kgositsile’s eyes to the parallels between black South Africa and black America; they revealed to Kgositsile Africa in America before he could travel to America. The effect of Langston Hughes’s poetry on Kgositsile is evident in the latter’s generous interdiscursive relations with Langston’s Hughes’ poem ‘Harlem’, which usually functions to re-order a sense of the past in the present, and to invoke the collective’s cultural values and self-image for purposes of spiritual cohesion and solidarity. Literary scholar and writer Sterling Plumpp finds Kgositsile’s reverence of Hughes’ work fascinating and he believes there are stark similarities between the two. He elucidates,

Oddly enough there is great similarity between Langston Hughes and Kgositsile in their efforts to forge a relationship with a commitment to the African American

⁹⁴ <https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/text/brief-guide-black-arts-movement> My emphasis.

⁹⁵ As Sam Raditlhalo aptly puts it (Raditlhalo, in Attwell and Attridge, 2012: 420).

community of the Harlem Renaissance and the Black Arts Movement. Hughes arrived in New York in the early 1920s from Mexico City to attend Columbia University ostensibly to become an architect. [...] Hughes becomes enthused with blues and black music and adopts and adapts blues verse as a basic stanzaic block to give authenticity to citizens of Harlem. His imagination as an artist reflected his commitment to the people of Harlem and their history and culture and struggles. Kgositsile, on the other hand, arrives in Harlem/New York City in the early 1960s to receive training at the New School. He ventures to Harlem and adopts its people as his own. He brings with him a fully developed imagination regarding his peoples' history and culture and struggles. He extends that imagination to communicate with Harlem and Black America. Jazz, blues and gospel are as natural to him as any Setswana folk song or proverb⁹⁶.

If the BAM is the second wave of the Harlem Renaissance, then Plumpp is here arguing that Kgositsile is to the BAM what Hughes was to the Harlem Renaissance. By extending his imagination to communicate with Harlem and black America, Kgositsile aligns himself with Hughes and the collective struggles of Afro-America in all directions of time. Hughes' work becomes emblematic of the tradition within which he strives to work. Hughes's imagination as an artist reflected his commitment to the people of Harlem and their history, culture and struggles, and this commitment found resonance in Kgositsile's committed vision of social change. In his pursuit of social cohesion and giving authenticity of the citizens of Harlem, Hughes looks to black music to find "current vernacular of the African American people". As Harris details the trajectory, "throughout his career, Hughes kept changing verse styles—first blues, then bebop, and then free jazz—to catch the transmuting voice of the African American masses" (Harris, 2004: 313). By working within the tradition of orality, black music and related forms, Hughes achieved a collective voice of tradition. Taking the baton from Hughes, Kgositsile readily finds black music to be "the strongest form that has always explained the African community, its spirit" (Kgositsile in Rowell, 1978: 32).

As a member of the BAM, Kgositsile "shared its commitment to music as a generative source of politicised aesthetics" which were "understood as historically-situated cultural *practices* which could be rehearsed, learned, and performed for specific political ends" (Jaji, 2009: 287,

⁹⁶ Interview via email exchange (2 April 2015).

291; original emphasis). It is through this circuit that members of The Last Poets looked towards *Black Fire* during their search for a name. The aesthetics of BAM were already aligned with black music as most successfully expressive of black experience. Amiri Baraka proclaimed of free jazz, “the new music reinforces the most valuable memories of a people but at the same time creates new forms, new modes of expression, to more precisely reflect contemporary experience” (Baraka, 1968: 267). In the 1960s, “Baraka’s project became the translation of the black free jazz voice into one for his poetry, a project similar to that of Langston Hughes” (Harris, 2004: 313). Similarly, Robolin observes that “those familiar with Kgositsile’s poetry also justly view his nine volumes of poetry through the prism of music” (Robolin, 2015: 71). Both poets, Baraka and Kgositsile, emphasize that poetry, at its best, is music (Kgositsile in Rowell, 1978: 35), and that poetry is “speech musicked” (Baraka, 1968: 243). A sense of experiential continuity charges these assertions, and also informs the relational affect that Langston Hughes poetry had on Kgositsile.

Tracing back the influences of music on the black expressive tradition takes us to the Harlem Renaissance and beyond the middle passage, back to Africa. In order to clear the groundwork for the discussions of Kgositsile’s influence on The Last Poets and consequent cultural heirs, I will map the trajectories and circuitry that take us back to Africa and find us again, in the 1960s moment when The Last Poets first lay their eyes on Kgositsile’s poem. In the following section the past is drawn from to make sense of the present; however the mapping of that genealogy will prove that histories and moving commodities, ideas and texts do not follow a neat linear pattern—it is inherently complex, and necessarily co-constitutive of both *roots* and *routes*. Jaji’s proposition of revisiting pan-Africanism as an ongoing theoretical potential here becomes welcomed. Where William Harris’ (2004) ‘How You Sound??: Amiri Baraka Writes Free Jazz’ studies Baraka’s utilization, emulation and translation of African American expressive form into another—African American literature; I strive to show how music is emulated and translated into literary forms in Kgositsile’s poetry for purposes of pan-African solidarity, to reveal a complex circuitry of ongoing trans-Atlantic black cultural exchanges and diasporic processes.

4.1.1 “How you sound defines who you are”

The influences of African oral traditions on the evolution of black poetry in black America from the 1920s gave rise to the poems that deployed jazz and jazz-related idioms, as evinced

in the works of Langston Hughes and Sterling Brown. That poetry found expression once more in the bebop of the 1940s which, as Floyd (1995) remarks, created a new language, one which the “uninitiated” would have to familiarize themselves, one that *signified* like no other. That language “was rooted in the language of everyday Black people so much that Sirdan (1980) claims that bebop saxophonist Charlie ‘Yardbird’ Parker’s advances were reputed to be so strongly rooted in common language of his culture that he’d play a phrase, and people might never have heard it before, but he’d start it, and the people would finish it with him, humming” (Kopano, 2002: 207). This is because, as Kgositsile asserts, “ritual relies on sound”, and that “how you sound defines who you are”, best exemplified in the above Charlie Parker example—black music is experiential and contingent on black life. Bebop also became important for its use of improvisation and for “highlighting the role of the drum” (ibid). Most importantly, bebop musicians’ attempts at presenting themselves as “serious musicians, even artists, and not performers” (Baraka, 1963) honed the phrase “keeping it real” which rap musicians with serious ambitions to continue the legacy use to communicate the same sentiment.

Poetry evolved into jazz poetry in its quest to overcome the limitations of notated or page poetry. The poetry album ‘Our Souls Have Grown Deep Like Rivers’⁹⁷ which records poets spanning from 1919 to 1999 reading against the background of jazz articulates this. The “Coltrane poem became a form of its own after the saxophonist’s death” in 1967 (Perchard, 2011: 286). In a quest to accentuate its oral and aural influences, black writers looked to jazz to influence both the structural and performative aspects of black poetry⁹⁸. This marriage of jazz and poetry found most expression in the 1960s and 1970s black arts poetry. Such poetry would use different strategies, like various forms of glossing in Kgositsile’s poetry, to signal a break from the textual to the oral and aural. The most salient feature of ‘riting’—relying on languages’ oral and aural components to divine over rituals—would be the “typographic representations of Black speech” which were “formulated in accordance with poetic practices already worked out by [...] black poets whose confrontations with modernist poetics on the

⁹⁷ A two-disc compilation of Africa American poetry, appropriating its name from Langston Hughes’ poem ‘My soul has grown deep like rivers’, and featuring readings against the background of jazz by Langston Hughes, Ishmael Reed, Nikki Giovanni, Gwendolyn Brooks, Amiri Baraka, The Last Poets, Gil Scott-Heron, Maya Angelou, Rita Dove, W.E.B. DuBois, Public Enemy, and Wanda Coleman; bringing together a range of black expressive cultures spanning from 1919 to 1999 under one banner of poetry.

⁹⁸ It is worth noting that not only black writers looked to jazz, but also the ‘beat’ poets in the 1950s, consisting mostly of white personnel such as William Carlos Williams, Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac. Amiri Baraka, then LeRoi Jones, started off as part of the ‘beat’ generation of Lower East Side, New York.

ground of language established the formal practices followed by subsequent African-American writers intent upon locating a black aesthetics in traditions of black orality and musical improvisation” (Nielsen, 1997: 9). The “modernist poetics” were affected and amped by orality, and textual parallels could be observed between jazz musician’s instruments and the poetry, such as in Kgositsile’s poem ‘For Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers’ which expresses a stereomodern relation through bebop:

But the drumhead rolled my name

...

Even here where wood

mates with skin on wax

to make memory, to place us

even in this hideous place

pp-pounding pp-pounding

the **ss-sss**sounds of who

we are even in this place

of strange and brutal design

Art Blakey was a bebop, hard bop and jazz drummer and here Kgositsile praises the “drumhead” for filling in the gap of drums and their function in society. Blakey’s drum and percussion pounds and sounds who they are: the pounding of the drum comes off the page, and the “sssounds” of the percussions are aural, creating a sibilance that functions well in pronouncing the auditory inflections of the poem. The power of rhythm and the spoken word in ‘riting’ celebrates movement: “rhythm it is we / walk to against the evil / of monsters that try to kill the Spirit / it is the power of this song / that colors our every act / as we move from the oppressor-made gutter / gut it is will move us from the gutter / it is the rhythm of guts / ... / it is the rhythm of unchained Spirit”—the repeated sounds of ‘gut, gut, gut’ to create parallels with a drum beat or syncopation. It is that rhythm and movement that celebrates the superiority of spirit, making life comprehensible, defensible, and accessible. ‘Riting’ honours spirit through song—all three cannot be chained. That is why Kgositsile finds music a privileged art form.

In our interview he stated that “in South African black communities, nothing of importance takes place without song” (Interviewed 4, 2014). Every occasion that is significant will

necessarily incorporate song, rhythm, and the oral to celebrate movement. He continues by drawing from an example of an individual performer reciting poetry in “a rural setting”: “even today if go to the rural areas and listen to the more capable poet, they interchange [...] you could have someone reciting and very seamlessly start singing then back to reciting without disruptive breaks” (ibid: 3). This is particularly true of *maboko*, or Tswana praise poetry, which would, no sooner than it had started, quickly escalate in pace and rhythm, into an incantation similar to a rap flow.

The locating of black aesthetics in the tradition of orality and jazz improvisation became germane to the development of rap: “rappers are more closely allied to the Black poetic tradition than the tradition of Black music”, argues Stewart and Duran, and “their art must be seen as yet another manifestation of the conjunction of Black poetry and Black music, a conjunction which, as we have seen, has deep historical roots” (1999: 51). This is certainly true of The Last Poets, who can be seen to bridge the era of Black arts poetry and that of rap. Rap as a component of hip hop was undergirded by the refinement of the word, with the spoken word as life-affirming, productive, generative, and redemptive. It rests, as Toop (1991) argues, on a black cultural continuum. Its forebears, he surmises, “stretch back through disco, street funk, radio DJs, Bo Diddley, the bebop singers, Cab Calloway, Pigmeat Markham, the tap dancers and comics, The Last Poets, Gil Scot-Heron, Muhammad Ali, acapella and doo-wop groups, ring games, skip-rope rhymes, prison and army songs, toasts, signifying and the dozens, all the way to the *griots* in Nigeria and the Gambia” (Toop, 1991: 19; my emphasis). The mapping back to West Africa is attributed to the Afro-Americans’ almost always tracing back their pre-Middle Passage lineage to that part of Africa and nowhere beyond. However scholars such as Russel Kaschula and Samba Diop have studied similarities between ‘the role of the *imbongi* [or southern African praise singers] and griot in Africa’ (1999), showing parallels between their styles and techniques.

Of course the continuum of the word from Africa is not limited to west and southern Africa. Africans in general revered the power of the spoken word. Even today in rural societies the life-affirming principle and life force is actualized by the art of speech acts. Kgositsile theorises the bridge between the two: “in African poetry you could not begin to talk about poetry without music. When rap started in the States [...] if you go back to the 1920s, they were consciously attempting to reclaim that African tradition. And today the more serious rappers, the ones that the industry will not try to promote to shove down people’s throats all

over the worlds, is still trying to do that, and when you read it on the page it is poetry by any standard” (Kgositsile, 2015a: 17). Ngugi wa Thiongo also makes an observation of a prototype of hip hop in Kenya, “which expresses itself in East Africa’s Gikuyu Festival, an event in which ‘the best poets of the various regions would meet in the arena, like in a hip hop [battle], and compete with words and instant compositions [freestyle]. These poets had even developed a form of hieroglyphics [graffiti]’” (in Walker, 1998: 93). These battles can be observed at southern African weddings where the poet-representative of each family takes turn to praise the bride/groom, outdoing the other poet with flare and “floss”—a form of boasting lyrical dexterity.

Toop’s comprehensive list of forbearers above is truncated by Kgositsile who links the griot and rap through his poetry. In that sense Kgositsile is a modern griot—an artist who “was, and still is, observer, commentator or councillor on the past and passing scenes. He happily still survives in some parts of Africa, not only rehandling traditional material [...] keeping the heroic feats of historical figures alive, but also commenting in traditional style on contemporary matters” (Palmer and Jones’s definition of ‘griot’, 1988: 1)—living amongst the people, recording his paeans in the form of *maboko* and performing their seamless marriage with music. This offers a good revision of why he is deemed “the original Last Poet”⁹⁹. His poetry, a combination of Tswana melodies and rhythms, and jazz and blues signification, has led to much collaboration with jazz and hip hop artists alike. The evolutions of black expressive cultures attest to the complexity of black modernity. The next section returns to the *Black Fire* moment and discusses Kgositsile’s cultural heirs.

4.1.2 The Last Poets

May 19th 1968 marked the third anniversary of Malcolm X’s death, commemorated at Harlem’s Marcus Garvey Park. Four young performers had just enjoyed positive reception at that festival, and decided to form a group. Oyewole recalls in the opening of his book *Branches of the Tree of Life* (2014), in a poem/supplication titled ‘Invocation’,

And a South African poet named Kgositsile said:

THE WIND YOU HEAR IS THE BIRTH OF MEMORY

⁹⁹ <http://www.slideshare.net/rbgstreetscholar1/the-original-last-poets-south-african-revolutionary-poet-keorapetse-kgositsile>

WHEN THE MOMENT HATCHES IN TIME'S WOMB
 THERE WILL BE NO ART TALK.
 THE ONLY POEM YOU WILL HEAR
 WILL BE THE SPEARPOINT PIVOTED
 IN THE PUNCTURED MARROW OF THE VILLAIN;
 THE TIMELESS NATIVE SON DANCING LIKE CRAZY TO
 THE RETRIEVED RHYTHMS
 OF DESIRE FADING INTO MEMORY
 Therefore we are The Last Poets of the world
 Said David Nelson, Gylan Kain,
 Felipe Luciano, Umar Bin Hassan, Jalal Nuriddin,
 Suliman El hadi, Abiodun Oyewole, and
 The heartbeat Nilija (Obabi)

...

We, The Last Poets, are the seeds
 For the rap artists to grow a garden
 And yet we are only a branch
 From the tree called Griot

...

It was in BAM's *Black Fire: An Anthology of African American Writing* (1968) that David Nelson read and responded to Kgositsile's incendiary battle cry. The Last Poets were moved by Kgositsile's vision of decolonization, and so impressed with his politics that they went on to title their first album 'The Last Poets' (1970). On the album cover they adorn afros and dashikis, posing with their conga drum on a sidewalk that could very well be in any black ghetto on the continent or its diaspora. It reached the US Top Ten Chart, unusual for such an unpopular genre referred to as "chanted rap poetry classics" (Powell, 1991: 246). In their 'When the revolution comes' we find the most overt reference to Kgositsile's poem when they also proclaim the end of poetry and the beginning of a revolution:

When the revolution comes
 When the revolution comes
 When the revolution comes;
Guns and rifles will be taking the place

Of poems and essays

Black cultural centres will be forts

Supplying the revolutionaries with food and arms

When the revolution comes

As this section progresses, it will become clear how The Last Poets not only coined a name from Kgositsile's poem, but also his rooted and routed practices—oral, aural, drumming, rhythms—as performative tools. Inasmuch as I will demonstrate clearly Kgositsile's influence on The Last Poet, their intertextual references to his work, and their admiration of his clarity of vision with regards to politics of decolonization and social action, I should also state here that Kgositsile attributes his poetic to the collective wisdom: "I would say that although individual artist have individual or personal styles, the collective style informs the individual styles and remains constant. [...] in terms of ideas, in terms of philosophy, in terms of wisdom [...] all of that, I believe, is collective or collected. What the particular person does is essentially [...] reach into the reservoir and dip it out" (Kgositsile in Rowell, 1978: 33). Raditladi's *Motswasele II* is a case in point in 'Towards a Walk in the Sun'. The Last Poets echoed his statement a decade later, "we're no more 'godfathers of spoken word' than the man in the moon; it comes in a package from the motherland" (Lawson in Levy, 1998:173). This package came in the form of a modern griot whose memory of 'Africa' informed his desire for a decolonized 'Afrika' using black expressive cultures as productive, generative, and transformative resources.

The mood of the time is pivotal to the circuitry of exchanges and influences. 'Towards a Walk in the Sun' may be seen as Kgositsile's continuing frustration on the death of revolutionary leaders in Africa and its diaspora. In 'Is the Black Revolutionist a Phony' published in the *Negro Digest* of July 1967, he expressed desperate anger in a language charged with inconsolable regret cloaked in biblical rhetoric at the death of Malcolm X, having been assassinated in 1965. As discussed in Chapter Two of this dissertation, the mood in the next years became incendiary and black anger palpable. Around this time, as James Lawson points out, "many African Americans had lost hope in the peaceful message of assimilation of Martin Luther King Jr., and had come to believe Black Nationalism and violent confrontation might be necessary" (Lawson in Levy, 1998: 172). As The Last Poets member Abiodun Oyewole states in an interview, "I really could not buy into King's program. The idea that we wanted to sit next to *them* in a luncheonette or a bathroom. You

got to build your own toilet. Don't beg anybody for your friendship. You be who you are"¹⁰⁰. The black nation was divided between violence and non-violence. Kgositsile was clearly and readily for violence. History had taught him, like Frederick Douglass and Leepile Raditladi, that power concedes nothing without a fight. He spoke to the heart of The Last Poets.

The songs on their eponymous album—'Niggas are scared of revolution', 'Run Nigger', and 'Wake up Niggers'; and on the second album 'Die Nigga!!!'—were screaming in the likeness of Coltrane's horn, with the venom of Kgositsile's vitriol, and their songs became the anthems of Harlem. Whilst the whole Black Power and Black Arts Movement fought against the signifier "negro" to label their race, and most certainly repudiated the derogatory and historically violent "nigger", The Last Poets shouted it at the top of their mind-bending and revolutionary rhymes. Kalamu ya Salaam explains,

Negro Digest changed its name to *Black World* in 1970 [...] The name change also reflected the widespread rejection of "Negro" and the adoption of "Black" as the designation of choice for people of African descent and to indicate identification with both the diaspora and Africa. The legitimization of "Black" and "African" is another enduring legacy of the Black Arts movement¹⁰¹.

The Last Poets were inspired to deploy this fire brand language by Kgositsile's own address to the black communities on both sides of the Atlantic. Their reclaiming of the word "nigger", formerly used to denigrate, delegitimize and dehumanize Africans who were stolen to the plantations of the Americas, is used in The Last Poets' oeuvre to attack the apathy and complacency of Afro-Americans in a time of war. This approach is evidently inspired by Kgositsile "getting angrier and angrier" in his poem where he does not hold back using caustic language to address those blacks leaning toward non-violence:

You who swallowed your balls for a piece
Of gold beautiful from afar but far from
Beautiful because it is coloured with
The pus from your brother's callouses.

¹⁰⁰ Interview with Abiodun Oyewole on <http://weblog.liberatormagazine.com/2011/05/last-poets-pure-potent-allowing-us-to.html>

¹⁰¹ <http://www.english.illinois.edu/maps/blackarts/historical.htm>

You who creep lower than snake's belly
Because you swallowed your conscience
And sold your sister to soulless vipers.
You who bleached the womb of your daughter's
Mind to bear pale-brained freaks.
You who bleached your son's genitals to
Slobber in the slime of missionary-eyed faggotry.
You who hide behind the shadow of your master's
Institutionalized hypocrisy the knees of your
Soul numbed by endless kneeling to catch
The crumbs from your master's table before
You run to poison your own mother. You too
Deballed grin you who forever tell your masters
I have a glorious past; ...

...

Who are we? All night long
I listen to the dream soaring
Like the tide. I yearn
To slit throats and color
The wave with the blood of the villain
To make a sacrifice to the gods. Yea,
There is pain in the coil around things
Where are we? The memory ...
And all these years all these lies
You too over there misplaced nightmare
Forever foaming at the mouth forever
Proclaiming your anger ... a mere
Formality because your sight is colored
With snow. What does my hunger
Have to do with a gawdamn poem?

...

Where *Motswasele II*'s Moruakgomo's address to his community is measured, and even going in a roundabout way to speak to the matter at heart, Kgositsile deviates from that style

and approach. He throws punches below the belt, and goes for the jugular: the community he is addressing is far from standing in unity against the villain. He watches with deep existential angst and expresses with regretful sorrow the “deferred dreams” that soar like a tide. He bemoans the apathy, passivity and inactivity of black people on either side of the Atlantic, a deterring factor from the dream of decolonization and ‘deniggration’. Kgositsile yearns to slit throats of villains just like Moruakgomo and his men, colouring the wave of the soaring tide with the villains’ blood. However he cannot do this alone lest he end up a misguided soloist in blind rebellion. The collective consciousness is being appealed to. He mourns that the men of his time have been converted to the ways of the white man; brainwashed into slaves and therefore brain-drained of power for action. They are eluded by the ‘beauty’ of an otherwise progressing America, but the beauty is coloured with the pus and blood from the slaves’ backs and callouses.

The brain is being appealed to during a time where black consciousness as a philosophy informed a desire to release one from the bondages of white supremacy that was not only content with “merely holding a people in their grip”, but sought to “[empty] the Native’s brain of all form and content” (Biko, 2005: 30). Kgositsile has been that native, in close proximity with the brutality of apartheid. He unveils the illusion of second-class-citizen-non-violence as the opium of black people under Jim Crow America; expressed in the line “forever foaming at the mouth forever / proclaiming your anger ... a mere / formality because *your sight is colored with snow*”. This is a critique of the daze and somnambulism caused by the rhetoric of black power without any decisive action. It is in loop, a mere formality to dupe the world into thinking there is a revolution underway. Kgositsile mourns that the only people who are duped are the black people: a tragic type of syndrome which is similar to a rat in a wheel. The lamentation in ‘Towards a Walk in the Sun’ would echo Steven Biko’s words, written in 1969 but published in 1978, in a milieu which further emphasizes how Africa on the continent and Africa in America are masterfully interwoven¹⁰² in Kgositsile’s work:

¹⁰² Kgositsile’s itinerant career reveals limitations in place-bound institutional memory, and thus necessitating a reading of his work via pan-African solidarities and affiliations, as opposed to whether or not, for instance, he was part of the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM). I argue that reading his work through the lens of pan-Africanism help us read organisations such as BCM and Black Power movement as engaged in dynamic transnational transactions. For instance, David Attwell observes aptly that “Black Consciousness was imported from the United States by individuals in the University Christian Movement, who latched onto Stokely Carmichael’s book *Black Power* (1967) and who later became instrumental in launching Saso [South African Student Organisation]” (Attwell, 2005: 143).

the type of black man we have today has *lost his manhood*. Reduced to an obliging shell, he looks with awe at the white power structure and accepts what he regards as the “inevitable position”. Deep inside his anger mounts at the accumulation insult, but he vents it in the wrong direction – on his fellow man in the township, on the property of black people. No longer does he trust his leadership [...] In the privacy of his toilet his face twists in silent condemnation of white society but *brightens up in sheepish obedience* as he comes out *hurrying in response to his master’s impatient call*. In the home-bound bus or train he joins the chorus that roundly condemns the white man but is first to praise the government in the presence of the police or his employers. His heart *yearns for the comfort of white society* and makes him blame himself for not having been “educated” enough to warrant such luxury. All in all the black man has become a shell, a shadow of man, completely defeated, drowning in his own misery, *a slave*, an ox bearing the yoke of oppression with *sheepish timidity* (Biko, 1978: 28-29; my emphasis).

The black man is defeated, and just like Biko’s scathing observation, Kgositsile laments this through the bitter images of lost manhood: “swallowed your balls”, “creep lower than a snake’s belly”, “swallowed your conscience”, “sold your sister”, “bleached the womb of your daughter’s mind”, “bleached your son’s genitals”, “slobber in the slime of missionary-eyed faggotry”, “hide behind the shadow of your master’s institutionalised hypocrisy”, “debailed grin” and most profane: running to poison your own mother. There is a visceral component to this type of self-study whose results seems to further denigrate the position of black men: his sheepish obedience as he obeys the master’s impatient call, his inevitable envy of the position of white luxuries and comforts, his sheepish timidity in the face of oppression—he is a *slave*. The black man that Biko and Kgositsile describe profile “a transnational geography of racial struggle” as Robolin calls it. Biko and Kgositsile’s prognosis point to the same treatment:

The first step therefore is to make the black man come to himself; to pump back life into his empty shell; to infuse him with pride and dignity, to *remind him of his complicity* in the crime of allowing himself to be misused and therefore letting evil reign supreme in the country of his birth. This is what we mean by an *inward-looking process*. This is the definition of “Black Consciousness” (Biko, 1978:29; my emphasis).

How do you make the black man come to himself? Kgositsile chose to escalate the language of *Motswasele II*, where those black men were not complicit in the crime of their king who let evil reign supreme on their land. He is also not in South Africa where the people are fighting in the country of their birth, with strong ties to the land. Therefore he settles for a language that takes no prisoners: inward-looking and stripping false pride in order to expose their complicity in the evils that consume them. He commences with a desperate call akin to speeches that would belted out to address the community on street corners of both Harlem and Soweto:

Where, oh where are
The men to matches
The fuse to burn the
Snow that freezes some
Wouldbe skyward desire

The focus only on masculinity is problematic since liberation movements on the continent and its diaspora have largely been gendered, marginalising the role of women, but that is not within the scope of my argument. The next line does not speak around the matter anymore but deploys Christian language that quickly turns caustic, collapsing the sacred and profane in his attack of the Christian system used in the justification of oppressing and enslaving blacks:

You who swallowed your balls for a piece of gold

That stanza that precedes the above line is strategically used to arrest the attention of the community, as someone worth listening to is about to deliver an important item of news, in the likelihood of talking around an issue before saying it blatantly. No ‘man’ can deny being the one who is addressed as a collective who will “matches the fuse to burn the *snow*”—that snow conceals his anger in the privacy of his toilet when his faces twists in silent condemnation of white society but brightens up in sheepish obedience as he comes out hurrying in response to his master’s impatient call. This is no different to Judas selling his soul for five pieces of silver. However Kgositsile here launches his attack by invoking sanctity and ritual: the written invokes the oral and the aural in “where oh where” and “you who swallowed your balls for pieces of silver”. Kgositsile appropriates through sound, the dirge or funeral song, “where, oh where”, reminiscent too of hymns, prayers or Afro-

American spirituals. He exploits the sanctity of that language by, instead of separating the piety that would be automatically invoked by that spiritual, shocking the reader by collapsing it with profanity—"you who swallowed your balls for a piece of gold". As such, he condemns those who think it is possible to be pious in their horrific social conditions. You cannot wish or pray away the "skyward desire", as he admonishes,

We must be honest though the *truth*, or the stench of our lives, be painful. [...] If you are in filth, your looking up at the skies or imagining yourself as a bird flying way up there will not clean up what needs to be cleaned nor will it move you away from it (Kgositsile, 1975: 13; original emphasis)¹⁰³.

The African dirge and related hymns are here appropriated to mourn a terrible darkness that has overcome the people. Inaction is tantamount to sacrilege: "slobbering in the slime". Kgositsile attacks the material body, striving to overlap the personal and political: deballed men, or men with bleached genitals, are reduced to sheep to the slaughter. This automatically attacks the rhetoric "we have a glorious past"—there is nothing glorious; there is filth and profanity. The past, no matter how glorious, will not clean up what needs to be cleaned. He condemns those who think they are better off because they adorn gold, but according to him they look "beautiful from afar but far from beautiful". This saying is transformed from the Afrikaans language: you are 'mooi van ver maar ver van mooi'. Under those golden trappings are sheepishly timid and obedient 'men', "the knees or [their] soul numbed by endless kneeling"—where is the glory or pride in that?

Kgositsile attacks Christianity and capitalism at once, by-products of western modernity. The men he addresses are seduced by the glitter they see in the media, and in the ongoing progressing America which they are so dangerously close to, but cannot be a part of. The very modernity they seek is built on the blood and pus from their ancestor's callouses. Like Biko suggested, Kgositsile reminds them of their complicity in the crime of allowing themselves to be perpetual victims. In attempting to pump life back into their shells, he echoes Fanon (1952) and Césaire (1972) in proclaiming that Christianity, capitalism, and western civilisation are negrophobic, and the negrophobia has been internalised by some blacks who turn it inwards and blame themselves for not being full participants in the fruits of

¹⁰³ Brooks, G. *A Capsule Course in Poetry Writing*, 1975. Broadside Press

modernity which are essentially the fruits of their labour. Kgositsile highly recommends that the blood of the villain be the sacrifice to the gods. The only way for black people on both side of the Atlantic to attain liberation is of course through remedying the psychological onslaught brought on by white supremacy, but also to fight a bloody war that will restore their integrity and glory—a process of “deniggerfying” themselves.

4.1.3 “Native son dancing like crazy”

In his *Grounds of Engagement* Robolin compares Kgositsile with Richard Wright: “as with Richard Wright [...] Kgositsile’s condition of exile began at home and prompted his exit. His efforts to politically remedy blacks’ nationally codified alienation sent him abroad” (2015: 71). It was during that exile-at-home that Kgositsile first met Wright’s revelatory prose. In the poem that appealed to black people’s walk towards the sun, he strategically culled a battle cry that roused both sides of the Atlantic by evoking Wright. He constructs an interdiscursive relationship between Wright’s *Native Son* and indigenous southern African oratory references, as they have been discussed in the previous section.

Kgositsile’s understanding of the role of a collective consciousness is central to this poem. When he read *Native Son* from the United States Information Service Office he realised that “the experiences, the life found in *Native Son* could have taken place in South Africa, it was very similar to ours [...] even instances in the book that were not exact replicates of our experiences were close enough for a South African reader to relate to” (Kgositsile in Taylor-Guthrie, 1996: 37). What Kgositsile stresses and draws on so powerfully is how, despite our “specific or practical Hells” raised by colonialism and slavery as black people, “if we understand a Bigger Thomas in Chicago, we are equipped to grasp their South African counterpart” (ibid: 38). The difference that Kgositsile points out is that “young people in South Africa were forced to be socially conscious from an early age. The ANC was everywhere. For instance, if you were a member of a debating team [...] there was probably a member of the team who was in the ANC Youth League” (ibid). Bigger Thomas stands for paucity in mobilised social consciousness, “Bigger Thomas did not belong to a movement.

He was a misguided force in a hostile environment. What happens to Bigger Thomas when he is part of uMkhonto we Sizwe (the ANC's liberation army)" (ibid)¹⁰⁴?

Kgositsile's concern here is collective consciousness without which a well-oiled machine of white supremacy could not be dismantled. In his article 'How Bigger was Born' (1940), Richard Wright tells us that there is not just one Bigger Thomas (Bigger), but many of them. He painstakingly draws from his childhood the number of them, five in this article, who "consistently violated the Jim Crow laws of the South and got away with it, at least for a brief sweet spell. Eventually the whites who restricted their lives made them pay a terrible price. They were shot, hanged, maimed, lynched, and generally hounded until they were either dead or their spirits broken" (Wright, 1940: 3). Wright also believed that because the Biggers were "so close to the very civilisation which sought to keep them out" they concocted a "myriad variety of reactions" and acted out of "outright blind rebellion" to that dire situation. It is that blind rebellion that Kgositsile critiques, as he believes that had Bigger been shaped by political ideology in his rebellion, had he fostered a socially conscious approach to his dissension, rooted in a collective rebellion instead of acting solitarily, then change would have been possible. Essentially, Bigger did not emerge from a collective with political philosophies anchored in a solid past from which he could draw to make sense of his present and future. All he knew was that the present is suffocating him.

1965 was a watershed moment in the political life of black people in the U.S. In February of that year black liberation leader and activist Malcolm X was assassinated. In his essay cited in an earlier section of this chapter, Kgositsile mourns the lack of political mobilisation through a strong black collective driven by core philosophies of liberation in the black community. That, he mourns, is what killed Malcolm X. He extends this reasoning to another article 'Is the Black Revolutionist a Phony' published in the *Negro Digest* of July 1967:

Brother Malcolm was assassinated at the beginning of his revolutionary maturity because of our collective weakness. Countless other perverted atrocities are continually perpetuated on us because of our collective weakness. Brother, what I am driving at is,

¹⁰⁴ There is the excluded story of Mary from Wright's novel, which has led critics such as Alan France to critique the text's "ultimate expropriation of patriarchal property, [and] the total consumption of the commodified woman" in her 'Mysogyny and Appropriation in Wright's *Native Son*' (1988). I am aware of the problematic nature of the restricted horizon of Kgositsile's view of liberation struggles, however the feminist critique lies outside the scope of this research.

for instance, that if our historical enemy [...] knew that should anything have happened to Brother Malcolm there would be chaos in Harlem that night; that the following day there wouldn't be a single white store on 125th street; that the very foundations of this system would have to cope with a Black uncontrollable power, the chances are that Brother Malcolm would still have been with us.

Kgositsile bemoans the political apathy and misguided individualism of Afro-Americans in a time of war. He further notes that “the major reasons Malcolm died *unprotected* is that many of us who were supposed to, did not actually know precisely who we were” (ibid; original emphasis). He detects Bigger Thomas’ pathology: a lack of collective wisdom from which to draw individual and collective strength, identity, knowledge of self, pride, and purposeful action (as opposed to what Wright calls outright blind rebellion). Some of the reasons Wright gives to why Bigger reacted in blind rebellion were that, “first [...] he had become estranged from the religion and the folk culture of his race. Second, he was trying to react to and answer the call of the dominant civilisation whose glitter came to him through the newspapers, magazines, radios, movies, and the mere imposing sight and sound of daily American life” (Wright, 1940: 4). The community that failed to protect Malcolm and led to that irretrievable loss was never a community to start with. They were individuals who resembled Bigger Thomas.

The spear of the revolutionary army uMkhonto we Sizwe (MK) in the hands of native sons stresses the experiential and social continuity between black South Africa under apartheid and black America under Jim Crow. Robolin observes that “repositioning these geopolitical spaces to redefine their relationship militates against a conventional view that takes these cartographies to occupy wholly distinct hemispheres and seditiously opposes a (nationally) separatist logic” (2015: 98). In a similar manner Kgositsile reconfigures the geopolitical spaces between black South Africa and black America, which in turn complicate the *roots* and *routes* debate postured by Gilroy. A narrative that clearly situates Bigger Thomas within the ANC’s armed wing from a position of a South African ANC member in black America, while writing women out of those narratives, offers a complex interweaving of Africa on the continent with Africa in America.

4.1.4 Kgositsile: The Original Last Poet

This section demonstrates how Kgositsile's poem 'Towards a Walk in the Sun' did not only provide a resource from which The Last Poets gleaned their name, but was also a resource base which provided them with a poetic, a repertoire, and the incendiary language that has come to characterise their music, and position them as grandfather of rap music. Mnemonic and metonymic of Africa, Kgositsile's antiphonic relationship with The Last Poets echoed through their eponymous album, in stereomodernism. Poet and literary critic Eugene Redmond aptly observes that "the atmosphere of 1960s and '70s black American literary circles was enhanced by a number of African thinkers, artists, poets, and novelists who arrived in America to teach, lecture, perform, and travel [...] the importance of this interaction among blacks from various parts of the globe in America cannot be overemphasized" (Redmond in Robolin, 2015: 74). On 'collaborating' with Kgositsile, Oyewole asserts that "it meant everything to connect with the mother, with mother Africa, period. The one thing they tried to do was cut the umbilical cord [...] it can never be cut"; and that, "it gives you something to strive for when you have a meaningful name" (Interview 1, 2014). The thing to strive for became fostering apprenticeship with Kgositsile's vision with respect to his politics, social change and struggle.

Kgositsile's anger in 'Towards a Walk in the Sun' resonated with the members of The Last Poets, as Oyewole recalled earlier—"he was growing angrier and angrier and angrier". Central to these poetics of disillusionment is rage about the infuriating circumstances blacks found themselves in. The seething rage informed the fire brand language in Kgositsile's poem, and consequently became the pulse of The Last Poets' songs. The profile of a 'nigger' is outlined by Kgositsile in 'Towards a Walk in the Sun':

... You too
 Deballed grin you who forever tell your masters
 I have a glorious past; ... *I have rhythm*;
 ... I have this; ... I have that. ...
 Don't you know I know all your lies?
 The only past I know is hunger unsatisfied
 The only past I know is sweating in the sun
 And a kick in the empty belly by your fatbellied master
 And *rhythm don't fill a empty stomach*

Kgositsile revealed the danger of this rhetoric—I have rhythm—to The Last Poets. They echo him,

Walk around Harlem
Took about a minute
Heard a voice cry out
'Niggers got rhythm'
My head spun around
The people had deserted
From that moment in time
Harlem became a desert
From that moment in time
Harlem IS a desert
Dow Jones went up
One point three
Harlem no change

During the 1960s and 1970s Harlem was the centre of political activity and pregnant with possibilities of a revolution. 125th Street in particular was the locus of political exchanges, debates, impromptu speeches, and even, as Kgositsile observed, “cold black hustlers” packaging “a slave’s groan and shudder [as] a commodity”, peddled “newly-wrapped in *brother, sister, revolution, power to the people*” (Kgositsile, 1971: 88; my emphasis). It is those hustlers and niggers who see the struggle as mere rhetoric and sloganeering, saying things like ‘niggers got rhythm’, and selling memorabilia of old civilisations. The tone of Kain’s verse above is incensed: his head spins around to face the hustler who said that, and as if aware of the potential of violence that could ensue, the streets get deserted. He gave a look to kill, so to say. This is to emphasise the repudiation of that phrase by members of The Last Poets. They are aware that rhythm does not fill the stomach nor start a revolution. A comment on the Dow Jones is an infuriating reflection on the capitalist system that surrounds them, America progressing without them, whilst there remains no change in their societies.

The image of the sun in ‘Towards a Walk in the Sun’ is relevant and central to Kgositsile’s literary influences. Referring to the apartheid regime, colonialism, and slavery as ‘a period of darkness’ (Head, 1977), and urging the black nation to move towards a walk in the sun is a

metaphor that relies on nature, and is powerful as the sun is a universal signifier, and is affective on both side of the Atlantic. Kgositsile made intertextual references to Raditladi's and Bessie Head's work, and The Last Poets unwittingly entered this transnational and transatlantic conversation and exchange in their 'Wake up niggers', which deploys the image of the sun to respond to Kgositsile's poem:

Night descends as the sun's light ends
And black comes back, to blend again
And with the death of the sun
Night and blackness become one
Blackness being you
Peeping through the red, the white, and the blue
Dreaming of lost black civilizations that once flourished and grew
HEY! - WAKE UP, NIGGERS or y'all through!
Drowning in the puddle of the white man's spit
As you pause for some drawers in the midst of shit
And ain't got nothing to save your funky-ass with!

"HEY! – WAKE UP, NIGGERS" is shouted in the same manner that Kgositsile's war cry is, notated in uppercases, enunciated, shouted at the top of their voices to rouse the many Bigger Thomases into action—to wake up from the dream of lost black civilisations that are not fuelling the fires of a revolution now. "WAKE UP NIGGERS" may also be seen as a call towards a walk in sun, represented by prising one's eyes open, finding consciousness, and walking away from the darkness of ignorance and misguided individualism. The death of the sun causes the symbolic loss of black civilisations, which have potential to restore black pride through its heritage and collective wisdom. The sun represents burning desire. Talking and talking, which Kgositsile critiques, leads to dreaming and no action; reverie of lost black civilisations veiled by the American flag (red, white, and blue), which also veils the puddle of "shit" and "spit" in which the "niggers" sleep and must wake up. The scatological image is influenced by Kgositsile's disgust and utter disdain—those that "pause for some drawers in the midst of shit" instead of awakening to the sun. That is, they slobber in the 'period of darkness' instead of evading the 'shit'. Through the "dialectic of rescuing, appropriation and recombination" (Gilroy, 1993), they reference 'the sun's light end', 'black's time ends', and the 'death of the sun' from Kgositsile's poem.

Whilst the African American community in the thick of civil rights movements was fighting to criminalise the condemning word ‘Nigger’, The Last Poets deployed it as a sharpened dagger or spear, with which to kill the ‘uncle toms’ who are ‘scared of a revolution’:
“Niggers tell you they're ready to be liberated / But when you say 'Let's go take our liberation' / Niggers reply: 'I was just playin'”. The word ‘nigger’ gained popularity with rap music, which The Last Poets spawned, whose lyrics of social critique avoided all euphemisms about their living conditions. It is a language ringing with urgency and desperation to make sense of their concrete jungle filled with trauma and horror:

WAKE up, niggers or you're all through!
Sitting in the corner with your **minds** tied to your **behinds**
Bona fide members of Niggers **Anonymous**
Never **knowing** which way you're **going** - **pimping** off life
Turning **tricks** to **slick dicks**, with candy **asses**
"All masses will be held tomorrow morning for the **Late Great** black maaaaaaan... "
(Ahhhhhhh-meeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeen...)
YOU NIGGERS UNDERSTAND?! UP AGAINST THE WALL
Black male and farmers, are a-blow you **away**
And you'll never live to see the **light** of **day**
And the **nightstick**, the **nightstick**, it **glides** GRACEFULLY **upside** yo' **head**
That's **right**, brothers and sisters, YOU **living dead**
When the **cock crows**, and the **night** goes
And it **saves** your **ass** in the nick of time
As you **wake** up and you start to find
Yourself, **laying** up in bed - **scratching** your **ass** and head
Trying to remember from where you recall this Vermeer nightmare
That always leave you feeling blue

This excerpt has all the makings of a rap verse and shares features with southern African orality in its deployment of internal rhymes, linking, alliteration, assonance, repetition, and the ‘shouting’ that signifies call-and-response. It relies heavily on sound to achieve a musical rhythm and flow, just like Tswana poetry would. ‘Linking’ is one of the main features of oral poetry and refers to the “structural pattern that links up various lines by commencing the next

line with the last or middle word or words of the previous line” (Schapera, 1965: 19). For example the fluidity of lines two to six in the above excerpt rely on linking and assonance to create a melodious flow: the words “minds”, “behinds”, and “tide”, “fide” ties the two sentences together by also linking the ‘b’ from “behinds” with the ‘b’ from “bona”. The sibilance and assonance in “minds” and “behinds” links with that of “members” and “Niggers Anonymous”, creating a rhythmic flow. The same goes for “never knowing” being linked with the “n” in the last line’s “anonymous”; and the internal rhymes in “tricks”, “slick”, “dicks” linked with the sibilance in “asses” and “masses”. This is a technique that makes *maboko* and rap sound musical without any instruments. The lines “all masses will be held tomorrow morning for the Late Great black maaaaaan / (Ahhhhhhh-meeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeen)” also position the piece as a ritual, a prayer, and a dirge that mourns and performs burial rites for the souls of black men. Music becomes a space in which ritualized and socialized memories of Africa, slavery, and Jim Crow are (re)constructed and performed (Gilroy, 1993).

The phrase “UP AGAINST THE WALL” is from Amiri Baraka’s ‘Black People’, a “highly cathartic” poem with “violent imagery” that “excited black listeners beyond the point of reason” (Brooks, autobiography). Part of the poem proclaims, “you can steal from a white man, he’s already stole it he owes you anything you want, even his life. All the stores will open if you will say the magic words. The magic words are: Up against the wall motherfucker this is a stick up” (Baraka, 1963). The Last Poets use a call-and-recall to galvanize actions in the manner of Baraka, but the black man does not see light of day; they are in darkness. They are fighting amongst themselves, blown away by the “nightstick, nightstick” gliding up their heads, rendering them the paradoxical “living dead”. They are the living dead because their lives do not amount to any valuable cause towards a revolution.

When they wake up they scratch their asses and head “trying to remember from where [they] recall this Vermeer nightmare that always leave [them] feeling blue”. Wordplay is part of oral dexterity, and a respected orator always strives to showcase his/her gifts through signification. The Last Poets are creating a riddle, also characteristic of oral traditions, where they set the audience up to dig into collective memory to ‘try to remember’ where the phrase ‘UP AGAINST THE WALL’ comes from, and if they do not, like Dutch painter Johannes Vermeer’s paintings, which are popular for their blue hues, they will be left feeling blue. Here they signify a European painter to relate to the “blues”—an African American genre of

music that capitalises on forlorn and morose tunes and lyrics. Baraka's poem 'Black People' has found a venomous expression in 'Wake Up, Niggers', and this venom is inspired by Kgositsile's war cry. The Last Poets align themselves with the project of "deniggerfying" black people to gather at Kgositsile's revolutionary call.

4.2 *The Excesses of Kgositsile's Poetry*

This section reveals the myopic view of using routes—with the middle passage as a site of origin—to map Black Atlantic cultures, by demonstrating the complex, multivalent circuit of engagement between black South Africa and Black America through music. This chapter commenced with the *Black Fire* moment when The Last Poets first read the poem 'Towards a Walk in the Sun'; created links between the BAM and Harlem Renaissance underpinned by music as a unique black expressive culture; traced the influence of African oral traditions on the evolution of black poetry in the black America in the 1920s; and showed how this latter trajectory informed BAM's commitment to music as a generative source of politicised aesthetics. This section expands that trajectory to Kgositsile's cultural heirs, and shows how the narrative of influences between black South Africa and black Africa is not a neat one, but one that is vibrant and multivalent. Jaji's stereomodernism has shown how pan-Africanism's ongoing and open theoretical potential must be taken seriously in these trans-Atlantic interlocutions.

Johannesburg-based hip hop outfit 'Tumi and the Volumes' (T&V) was South Africa's first to perform with a band, exploring the influences of jazz, funk and blues. Just like The Last Poets, Molekane is closely allied to the black poetic tradition than the tradition of black music, and in fact started off as a member of a 9-piece poetry outfit PERM. His art represents the conjunction of Black poetry and Black music, and this can be understood in the context of him featuring performance poet Lebogang Mashile, as well as Kgositsile, in his albums; poets who have both taken to the jazz form as a vanguard that shapes their poetic. Molekane was born to exiled South African parents in Tanzania, and 'returned' to South Africa to settle in Johannesburg, becoming a permanent feature on the spoken word scene. His work explores issues of identity and belonging. It was his upbringing which informs their artistic sensibilities and diasporic consciousness.

The tradition within which Kgositsile works attracted Molekane as it resonated with the latter's artistic statement: that "we need to treasure [artists like Kgositsile] by creating systems that promote the passing down of their genius. It is the tree from which today's talent picks from"¹⁰⁵. Staying true to this, he featured Kgositsile on his hip hop album *Tumi and the Volumes* (2006) on a track titled 'Johnny Dyani', after Kgositsile's poem of the same title, after the jazz double bassist from South African legendary jazz band The Blue Notes. On T&V's album the song features an outstanding bass line from the band's bassist Dave Bergman, flowered by Kgositsile's melodic and jazzy voice reciting the poignant jazz poem, and has pulled both Kgositsile and Dyani out of the shelved archives into the collective memory of post-94 youth culture. Lifestyle journalist Percy Mabandu wrote of how all jazz records are connected; "plugged into one another through an infinite web of band membership, themes, and composition revisitations"¹⁰⁶. Likely, in Kgositsile's poetry comes together an infinite web of transnational jazz figures, bands, and composition revisitations: a key site of stereomodernism. He meditates on the "excesses of Kgositsile's poem" (ibid) on the T&V album:

Consider, for instance, that moment you first encountered the name of the great jazz bassist Johnny Dyani through a poem by Keorapetse Kgositsile off *Tumi and the Volume's* eponymous album. Your curiosity whet, you type Dyani's name into Google. The search engine returns a number of his albums, including the 1978 SteepleChase release *Song for Biko*. Snagged by that revolutionary's familiar name, you check out that album to discover a tune titled *Joburg – New York*. While listening to it, you might be struck by a trumpeter called Don Cherry. [...] The trail of Cherry's work uncovers a record called *The Shape of Jazz to Come*, one of four records made in 1959 that went on to change the future of recorded music. The title is a fascinating one. It opens you up to jazz music's conversations with atomic science and abstract expressionism in visual arts through a composition called *Lonely Woman*. [...] You might even find out that South Africa's own Kesivan Naidoo and the Lights reworked *Lonely Woman* in 2010. This discovery brings you back to the home circuit, where more records sustain the elaborate network and economy of meaning¹⁰⁷.

¹⁰⁵ <http://www.okayafrica.com/news/tumi-molekane-return-of-the-king-interview/>

¹⁰⁶ <http://www.theconmag.co.za/2014/06/05/i-fuck-with-every-record/>

¹⁰⁷ <http://www.theconmag.co.za/2014/06/05/i-fuck-with-every-record/>

These transnational figurations of jazz bring you back ‘home’, and cast Molekane in the stereomodern twentieth century. Naming creates a vibrant and codified circuitry of meaning. T&V’s song and Kgositsile’s poem opens up a world of meaning, and the intoxicating bass line on T&V’s album starts to make sense. Dyani’s *Song for Biko* gives a frame of reference to the spirit of that album, and an understanding of who Steven Biko was, and what he stood for certainly adds to the appreciation of the music. Similarly, the name ‘The Last Poets’ opens up an elaborate network of meaning that might help to contextualize their politics. When you type it into Google the search engine returns a number of articles, all of which point to Kgositsile as the source of their name. Dyani’s composition ‘Joburg – New York’ finds parallels with Kgositsile’s journey and relationship with black America, which undergirds the “excesses” of his poem. It might reveal transnational intimacies between Joburg and New York, and the two countries as articulated by Gil Scot-Heron—whom Google would have certainly brought up with The Last Poets—in his album ‘From South Africa to South Carolina’ (1975), articulating the shared racist status quo in both countries in songs such as ‘Johannesburg’, which ends with the declaration, “L.A.’s like Johannesburg / New York’s like Johannesburg”. Such is the power of naming and cross-generational homage through historical references and cultural archaeology.

Rapper Molekane is conscious of the elaborate network of meaning that can be created by cross-fertilization of genres, forms, and generational voice. Featuring Kgositsile is both recognition of his struggles within anti-liberation struggles, which Molekane’s mother was part of¹⁰⁸, and a celebration of his legend as having divined over The Last Poets’ coming of age, which birthed a form he champions in present day. The development of poetry, bebop, jazz, rap and hip hop birthed a curious yet logical genre of “jazz rap” of “jazz hip hop”, spearheaded by the likes of A Tribe Called Quest, whose second album has been observed by Joseph Patel as establishing “a consummate link between generations, taking the essence of jazz and the essence of hip hop and showing they originated from the same black centre” (Patel, 2003: 25). One of the members of A Tribe Called Quest, Q-Tip’s often-cited rhyme on the track ‘Excursion’ from their 1991 album *The Low End Theory* is telling of the looping influences between black expressive cultures. When he, as a teenager, listened to hip hop:

¹⁰⁸ “I was in Morogoro. My parents were terrorists you see. So that’s where they had all the babies and the kids were born”, he tells *MindMap* magazine. His parents were in Morogoro, Tanzania, where that government had given the ANC a plot of land from which to run their affairs. Kgositsile came back from the U.S. to teach at University of Nairobi and shortly after Dar es Salaam, where he was actively involved in the education of Morogoro children and links between SOMAFCO and the Universities.

“My pops used to say it reminded him of bebop / I said ‘well daddy don’t you know that things go in cycles?’ / ‘Way that Bobby Brown is just ampin’ like Michael [Jackson]” (1991). That song appropriates a dialogue from The Last Poets’ track titled ‘Time’ from their 1971 album *This is Madness*, whose title track features tenor saxophonist Pharoah Sanders, whose album *Thembi* (1971)—the name of his South African wife—contains liner notes in the form of a poem written by Kgositsile (‘Pro/creation’, 1974).

‘Pro/creation’ expresses stereomodernism, and speaks to the process of creativity in black expressive cultures: in the process of creating one is always procreating, as Kgositsile believes, drawing from the collective reservoir. The title speaks of continuity and re/birth in the cycles, which can be studied between the hip hop generation, and the jazz and poetry one. What Q-Tip of A Tribe Called Quest said above, including that he grew up in a household “filled with music [...] My father listened to Duke Ellington, Miles Davis and John Coltrane” (*Jazz Times* 32, no.2. March, 2000: 38) demonstrates a musical lineage of jazz and hip hop: “from a practical standpoint, the artists’ parents and siblings often had record collections that were readily available and could be used to sample” (Williams, 2010: 441). This extends to the poets and writers alike, as in the case of Kgositsile living with his uncle Tholo, a bebop and *mbaqanga* enthusiast, who cultivated a love for jazz and contributed to the finely-tuned aural influences in Kgositsile’s ear and voice:

music, like the written word, had always been there as some kind of artistic twins in my life. And maybe at the level of artistic expression, music being arguably the elder twin—because I think, although I cannot sing, I cannot hold one note, I think that my ear for music had a very serious influence on my ear for music in language; to the degree that I would say I write a poem the same way that a soloist with an instrument takes a solo (Interview 5, 2015).

Here Kgositsile’s access to music is congruous with growing up around music instruments or with parents that collect jazz records. He continues to describe the practice of writing his poetry as the jazz practice of taking a solo, which can be seen as the hip hop process of free-styling—“when I start I have no idea of which way the poem is going until it is finished” (ibid). The fluidity between these art forms and different generation is observable in the number of rap artists who have jazz musician parents: Nasir Jones’s (Nas) track ‘Bridging the Gap’ features his father, Olu Dara Jones, who provides the hook of the song by narrating his

path and how Nas was born. Olu Dara is a jazz cornetist, guitarist and singer. The title deliberately bridges the generational gap, but also the gap between hip hop and jazz. Cape Town-born and Brooklyn-based rapper Tsidi Ibrahim (Jean Grae) is Abdullah Ibrahim and Sathima Bea Benjamin's daughter. And most importantly, rapper Thebe Neruda Kgositsile (Earl Sweatshirt) is Keorapetse Kgositsile's son, and was already hailed a supreme lyricist and most talented member of his Los Angeles-based hip hop crew Odd Future at just 19 years of age.

Thebe is named after the Chilean poet, whom the older Kgositsile muses "meeting Pablo Neruda around 1969, and I still consider Neruda easily the foremost poet of the 20th century" (Interview 1, 2013). Born in 1994, Thebe, Tswana for "shield"—a shield that would defend a warrior from launched spears—symbolises continuity in Kgositsile's life and work, where the personal and the political are at perpetual interplay. This is inherent in the act of bequeathing a Tswana name to an American-born son; the 'shield' represents the ongoing struggles of being black in this world; and 'Neruda' articulates the hopes of launching dissonance against any injustice, particularly through words. These dreams would be prophetic, once more showing a complex simultaneity of memory and desire, and the past and future in Kgositsile's poetic—a leitmotif central to the next chapter. The dreams, rooted in history, are articulated in *The New Yorker*: "Thebe Kgositsile had a shadow life as a literary character, a projection of other people's enthusiasms and imaginings, long before Odd Future came into existence. [cites a poem from 1995 by Sterling Plumpp] [...] This is a baby imbued with the spirit of South Africa's martyred heroes"¹⁰⁹. These continuities and their symbolic meanings are not lost on Sterling Plumpp. He comments in *The New Yorker* on Kgositsile's and Cheryl Harris's (Thebe Neruda's mother) marriage, "I felt the diaspora had been reunited in their union" (ibid).

The 'reunion of diaspora' can be seen to symbolise the continuity of the cycle from African oral traditions, to their voyage across the Atlantic, to their evolution into oral jazz poetry in the Harlem Renaissance, to the adaptation of their nuances in bebop, to their landing their screams and crescendo to free jazz, to the poetry of the Black Arts Movement, to its reinvigoration into rap (**rhythm and poetry**), to the advent of rap music, to its evolution into hip hop, to jazz-hip hop, to hip hop-poetry which featured spoken word poetry, to the reunion

¹⁰⁹ <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2011/05/23/wheres-earl>

of poetry, rap, and jazz—symbolising the reunion of the diaspora in the twenty first century. Kgositsile’s poem or *leboko* (praise poem) ‘Rejoice’ (2002), dedicated to Thebe Neruda, celebrates this reunion and continuities:

REJOICE

Says Thebe Neruda of the vibrant smile
The eye so curious it is reluctant
To shut the world out even in sleep
I am the dreamkeeper he says
The spontaneous song and the dance
Pulsating with the force of my people’s ethos
Watch me
And rejoice

Our sister Betty Carter
Repository of our memory
Whose mouth is free of all untruth
Who plays her voice as a horn
Says you can do anything
You want to do
If you know what to do

I am witness and celebrant here
I do everything I want to do
Because I know what to do
I am the dreamkeeper I say
The mouth that tells no lie
I am not a man
I am a boy
Beneficiary of the fruit
Harvested from my people’s memory
Watch me
And rejoice

Poet leave him
Leave him alone
You have praise him
You have praised him
Without knowing his name
His name is Mouth-that-tells-no-lie

In Kgositsile's life and work he continues to harvest the fruit of his people's memory, in the form of his people's oral traditions, evident in this praise poetry form. He is their dream-keeper. Likely, in continuity, his son becomes the beneficiary, harvesting the fruit of his lineage. That fruit is the spoken word and the power it bestows. Thebe Neruda has joined the spontaneous song and dance of his people by heeding the call of oral poetry in the form of rap. The form of this poem traces the lineage from the song and dance of his people, to jazz (Betty Carter), to rap, and right back to poetry. Carter's voice is repository of the collective memory for it also pulsates with the force of the people's ethos. This is also summoned in the naming ceremony of 'Neruda'—a poet and political activist, representing the dreams and visions of Chile. Neruda was a dream-keeper too. Kgositsile's people have passed on, as have Carter and Neruda, but the power of the word keeps their memory alive. Neruda, "Mouth-that-tells-no-lie", speaks with a voice like a horn: his poetry is music. Kgositsile's poem is also music as it sings with the voice of many generations.

Flowing with the motions of continuity within the cycle, we conclude by returning to the *Black Fire* moment, but this time in another milieu in the twenty-first century, where the poem 'Towards a Walk in the Sun' is cited in *The New Yorker* of May 2011, mulling over the generational wordsmith-genius of father and son. The author of the six page spread, Kelefa Sanneh, writes,

Something about this image—the poet, awaiting the end of poetry and the start of revolution—captured the imagination of a group of like-minded oral poets in Harlem, who called themselves the Last Poets, in tribute to Kgositsile. Starting in 1970, the Last Poets released a string of fiery spoken-word albums that prefigured the rise of hip-hop. Of course, some might say that hip-hop betrayed the promise of Kgositsile and the Last Poets, instead of fulfilling it. (During the genre's thirty-odd years, there has been a

minimum of “art talk” and a maximum of “punctured marrow”). When South Africa’s day of redemption finally came, in 1994, “the moment” was later than Kgositsile imagined, and maybe gentler, too¹¹⁰.

In spite of dreams deferred, black expressive cultures and cultural archaeology have sustained Kgositsile’s belief that “art is affirmation of life as creative force”; or “*art is life worked with*; is like / wheeled, or whelmed: / assessed: / clandestine, but evoked”, as Gwendolyn Brooks’ appraisal of Kgositsile’s in the introduction of *My Name is Afrika* (1971: Introduction; original emphasis). That is, through art we become creators of our worlds. Asked about his son’s glowing career as a rap protégé, Kgositsile states, “Frantz Fanon said each generation must find its own mission. If he’s part of those that have found their mission, then I’m very happy”¹¹¹. Kgositsile’s citation of Fanon is layered and reveals the ideal of finding your mission as tantamount to bridging the mission of past and future generations. And art, particularly of the black tradition, informs a specific ‘belonging’ and ‘becoming’ that inevitably links the future with the past. He is happy because in the wheeling, whelming and assessment of art as life, Thebe Neruda voice will be shaped by the lineage of the black archive. As Sterling Plumpp (1995) puts it in the poem ‘Poet: for Thebe Neruda’ which ends as thus, “You / were born with blues. / With an ANC imprint / on them. How you gon / do anything but rule?”; a poem that made it into the anthology, *The Best American Poetry* (1996), which through naming propagates continuity in the cycle of black expression.

4.3 Conclusion

Kgositsile’s involvement in the BAM simultaneously complicates and enriches the ways in which scholarship tends to understand relations between Africa and diasporic cultural production. Through the analyses of multivalent black transnational exchanges, this chapter demonstrated a complex matrix of cultural exchanges and diasporic processes. Using Gilroy’s concept of the Black Atlantic to simultaneously frame as well as challenge its geopolitical formation, this chapter drew attention to the participation of Africa in the “counterculture of modernity”, extending that scope from the global North to South Africa. Through an intricate mapping of the lineage of black expressive cultures, the notion of the stereomodern further brought to the fore the complicated expressions of pan-African solidarity through music,

¹¹⁰ <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2011/05/23/wheres-earl>

¹¹¹ <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2011/05/23/wheres-earl>

evident in Kgositsile's life work. It has revealed that the practice of 're-membling' in the pursuit of affirming black identities, Africans at home and in the diaspora have looked to African oral traditions to forge continuities and social cohesion. Music became the key circuitry of exchange, and has been shown to stand the test of time through the many excesses of the poem 'Towards a Walk in the Sun'. That poem's caustic and incendiary language birthed an era of rap within the hip-hop culture, and till present time that culture's troubling idiom "nigger" is still overwhelmingly controversial. This classic stereomodernist moment between Kgositsile and The Last Poets points us to South Africa as a key site when recording the origins of rap. This way, the overlapping of roots and routes are shown to undergird pan-African solidarity through music.

Chapter Five: Setswana and NOW-Time

When what you do to make your life meaningful is upset by outside forces, your life takes on a certain immediacy, so that your present, past, and future are simultaneous; they are all NOW. You reclaim and assert your past in the present, and you fashion and embark upon your future now; in the present (Kgositsile, interviewed by Greg Synder, 1995)¹¹².

In his paper ‘Translation as Erasure: Thoughts on Modernity’s Epistemic Violence’, Rolando Vázquez (2011) argues that the ‘colonized’ come from different temporalities to that of the ‘colonizer’ (37). That is, the temporal order of modernity’s colonialism is different to that of its colonies. This chapter explores how Keorapetse Kgositsile reconciles the two temporalities—his indigenous temporal order, with modernity’s temporality—in his poetry, guided by the wisdom of his Setswana archive synthesized with historical developments in time. It puts to use Harry Garuba’s (2003) notion of *animist realism* to study how, in his desire for a decolonised Africa in the future, he absorbs modernity’s linear time into animist modes of thought, thereby constructing a double location of time. In his reckoning, Kgositsile (1971) decisively ‘splits time’s skull with [a] spearpoint’ (22). That is, he uses a traditional implement¹¹³ to split the cranium or logic of modernity’s time, and synthesize it with the temporalities of his roots. To achieve this ‘split’ in his poetry, Kgositsile coins the concepts of “NOW”, “future memory”, and “coil of time” to account for time that is outside modernity’s (dis)figuration of time. This chapter investigates the application of those concepts in his poetry.

¹¹² Greg Synder, “Life’s Truth Aesthetically Interpreted: Greg Snyder Talks with Keorapetse Kgositsile”, Bulletin #21 6.2 (1995). <http://www.newschool.edu/teds/twenone.htm> (accessed September 28, 2006 by Tsitsi Jaji). The New School has since updated their website, and this interview is no longer available. Therefore this quote is directly from Jaji’s paper ‘Synaesthesia as Purposeful Distortion in Keorapetse Kgositsile’s Poetry’ (2009).

¹¹³ The image of the spear is recurrent in Kgositsile’s poetry, and is also informed by the spear of the ANC’s armed wing, Mkhonto we Sizwe, or ‘spear of the nation’. This spear is a traditional war weapon, and can also be read as an aesthetic parallel of fighting modernity with tradition, the same way he counters secular /non-animist rationalization with traditional knowledge systems.

The split of time in Kgositsile's poetry is owed to disenchantment with the world, brought on by, as what Garuba calls "the changes in attitudes and practices occasioned by the increasingly secular rationalization of the world brought about by modernity and the rise of capitalism" (Garuba, 2003: 266). In the prologue of this chapter he articulates a past that is materialising in the present, fashioning a desire for a particular future, NOW. The outside forces that upset his life are due to the "clash of cultures and the agony of the man ... caught in the throes of opposing conceptions of the world and of social life" (ibid: 270). This clash occasions the splitting of time, what Garuba calls *animist realism*—"the continual re-enchantment of the world" through the 'spiritualization of the object world' (ibid: 284). Through the process of re-enchanting the world Kgositsile endows time with spirit, thus giving it a concrete dimension. Secular rationalization does not account for other rationalizations that come from the Third World and its histories. Through the image of the spear splitting the temporal order of secular rationale, Kgositsile asserts a "form of collective subjectivity that structures being and consciousness", deploying a conception of time and space that is "*attributed to the indigenous resource base*" of Southern Africa (ibid: 269-270; my emphasis). Garuba grounds his discussion on animism as "a process whereby 'magical elements of thought' are not displaced but, on the contrary, *continually assimilate* new developments ... within a basically 'magical' worldview" (ibid 267; my emphasis). That is, the traditional is not left behind to ossify, but continually shapes and synthesizes with the modern.

The presence of the premodern in the form of indigenous modes of thought in Kgositsile's poetry is owed to the collective stream of consciousness, from the traditional to the modern. To revisit the prologue of this chapter, the simultaneity of time in the present is due to the reproduction of animist modes of thought informed by what Garuba terms the "animist unconscious" (2003). In the process of writing Kgositsile's mode of thought, whose roots are fed by the Tswana and southern African indigenous archive, is "so structurally implanted, it is not longer just an epiphenomenon or simply an effect but becomes a producer of effects and therefore acts as a driving force in the formation of collective subjectivity" (Garuba, 2003: 269). Regarding his writing process Kgositsile offers,

When you write a poem ... before you create it you have to destroy, you have to dismantle certain aspects of life, dismantle language, and reassemble them in your voice, after finding out what you are most responsive to, *or in the process of finding*

out. ... Because it is *exploratory*, until it is finished I do not know what the content is anymore than the next person. That you have to trust your imagination, your handling of language, and your depth of feeling, that hopefully none of that will betray you when you start writing. ... The improvisational element is there because of the exploration. ... When you sit down to write although you are not thinking about a particular thing, all of *what has accumulated* to inform your response to whatever slice of life at the moment of writing, is not anything new really. It is an *accumulation*. ... (Interview 2, 2013; my emphasis).

The significance of an accumulation is how it feeds and shapes the process of imagining, handling language, and producing a poetic. This process is so deeply nourished by the animist unconscious that Kgositsile proclaims that until the poem is finished he does not know what the poem is ‘about’. Writing as such becomes exploratory, and has improvisational elements. He told Danille Taylor-Guthrie that “fiction doesn’t work for me because I think in images. My images aspire to be clear pictures carved out of sound” (1996: 36). The reasons for this have to do with the oral and aural nature of the indigenous archive: “in oral poetry—and poetry remains oral and aural, even on the printed page—there is no demarcation line between song and verse, between song and poetry” (Interview 5, 2015). As such, in the process of exploring the accumulated images, the forms and aesthetics of the indigenous archive also in/form the artistic process, sounding his poetic.

In his introduction of *If I could Sing* (2002), Sterling Plumpp explores this, “these poems are no mere slogans. One might observe that their rhythms alone are both stunning and original; perhaps drawn from the insistence of an inner-ear sensitive to the possibility of utilising music and Setswana to affect poetic lines” (2002: 7). In our interview Plumpp elaborated on this,

I do not believe Kgositsile consciously retains the essence of Setswana in the aesthetics of his poems as he writes. It is a subconscious act. His imagination bends his language that the autonomy of his mother tongue takes over¹¹⁴.

¹¹⁴ Email exchange 2 April 2015.

This is worth noting in the discourse of ‘animist unconscious’, as the concept carries baggage that inevitably evokes the essentialism debate. Garuba explains that he chooses to “describe the practice of *continually re-enchanting the world* as a manifestation of the animist unconscious in order to move the argument away from the charge of essentialism, which is likely to arise if this were seen as the natural, immutable, collective instinct of a people, and to avoid the cultural binarisms that investigations of this sort often unwittingly impose” (Garuba, 2003: 266; original emphasis). This is important, because Kgositsile recognizes this re-enchantment in Pharoah Sanders and John Coltrane, and in some Afro-American writers’ work too. The animist unconscious is not about actively and consciously going into an immutable archive preserved at a cultural site, it points to how those ‘magical elements of thought’ do not get displaced, but continually adapt and absorb new developments into animist realism. In Kgositsile we observe how this operates within the *roots en route* paradigm, where, in his poetry informed by political desire, he ‘hears’ from and ‘sees’, in an observer-observed relationship, the collective desires for decolonization informed by memory. I examine these concepts in Kgositsile’s ‘Shotgun’ (1971, 21):

Five deaths ago my
Name was born
Inside the thigh
Of a breath. Over

300 years in the grip
Of blood-drenched sweat I
Walk the flesh of the future
Like the heir’s nimble
Grin at diamond dust. And my
Son playing in the nimble
Leaves of the mimosa soil-bound

Over 300 years ... but every night
The red-lipped sun kisses the sea
The leaf mates even
With factory-filthed air
And love loves love

Bathed in a drop of the sun
Kissing the singing muscle
Of the mine labourer's son

Over 300 years of deballed grins...

Once-torture-twisted sighs
Of uprooted orgasms
Colour the air with riffs
Of future impulse. Self-born
Maumau splits time's skull
With spearpoint flesh of mystic mask
Of built-in SHOTGUN weaved
In sounds like my daughter's
Memory of anguished joy in nigger-
Hard shadows screwing
The right moment ... Uptight
The raggedy-ass prophet says
Everything is alright...

This poem addresses imperialist white supremacist capitalism, which has imposed a deeply-entrenched order—over 300 years—in society. Colonial modernity and capitalism, referenced through “blood-drenched sweat”, “diamond dust” and the “muscle of the mine labourer’s son”, are only in service of the ruling classes and do not benefit the miners, which are synecdoche for the oppressed. However, instead of being disenchanted with this reality, Kgositsile re-enchants that world by absorbing modernist desires into animist realism. The first stanza situates Kgositsile through his name in a long lineage that stretches back to premodern generations (“five deaths ago”). His name Keorapetse Kgositsile, Tswana for “we are blessed to have a son”; “the king has arrived”, propels his desires. They birthed and breathed royal force into him, and now he “walk[s] the flesh of the future”, an “heir” offering a “nimble grin” at white oppressive powers. Within the relationship of grounding his poetic in the past, he is able to branch into the future through animism: “my son playing in the nimble leaves of the mimosa soil-bound”.

The mimosa tree and the soil are spiritualized. They represent the land which must be fought for (self-born Maumau). He re-enchants the invaded land through a Setswana proverb: “mosadi mooka”, which means “a woman is a mimosa tree”. He constructs a timeline that enables him to ‘see’ his son (the future) soil-bound in his land because, as the proverb continues, “mosadi mooka o nya le motshegare”, or “a woman is a mimosa tree, she oozes nutritious gum even in winter/broad daylight”. That is, even in the winter of colonialism and apartheid’s discontent, the land continues to feed him. His son is playing in leaves, which suggests that they are fallen leaves on the ground. Here the spirit of revolutionary action is given local habitation. In ‘New Age’ (1982) Kgotsitsile wrote that “in the dry season / leaves will dry and fall to fertilise the land / whose new flowers black green and gold / are a worker’s song of fidelity to the land that mothered you”. The fallen leaves are the fallen freedom fighters, who are nimble because they are aware that theirs is a sacrificial death, hence “fidelity to the land”. They fertilize the earth, and in a new season the tree produces flowers of ANC colours. The object world of leaves and the tree are spiritualized. The animist unconscious shapes his collective subjectivity—*Ngaka, Mosadi Mooka* is the title of his former teacher-and-Tswana-literature-author-extraordinaire D.P. Monyaise’s novel (1965) which also draws from the proverb of Batswana.

The third stanza picks up on those leaves, where after the red-lipped sun kisses the sea, that is, in a period of darkness (exile, apartheid, Jim-Crow, colonialism), the leaves still mate even in “factory-filthed air”, because love underpins the desire for a decolonial future. Colonial modernity’s commercial industrial economies are referred to here in a moment of disenchantment with living in an imperialist centre of capitalism. However the sun’s kisses assure him that time marches on, and when absorbed into a temporality modelled on nature’s cycles, then there is assured hope of desires realized. The sun is love, and it is persistent, rising every day, just like the desires for emancipation, giving the due freedom to the heir of the mine labourer. There is love; the desire for liberation is the desire to free the oppressed from bondage and dehumanization.

The past and the future are put in a dialectical poetic. Setswana of five centuries ago is in a future time: he is of the clan of kings signified by his surname which means ‘the king is here’. In what he articulates to be in a not-so-distant past his people were kings and ‘gods of

their day’¹¹⁵. Usurped from that seat of royalty by history, Kgositsile becomes a “self-born Maumau”, that is, he must fight for the restoration of his people’s dignity. He is self-born because he is singularly inspired, armed with the spear of his ancestors as he is the flesh of the clan’s mystic mask—the mask was discussed in chapter three as co-constitutive of the self, spirit self, and communal self through the concept of the ‘ena’. He wields the shotgun and spear, transforming them into the mystical and magical. This moment is accompanied by sound—“riffs of the future” and “sounds like my daughter’s memory of anguished joy in nigger-hard shadows”, which is the memory of female experience of love during slavery, colonialism and apartheid. The desire for a precolonial future is a desire for the emancipation of the woman, whose spirit was earlier, within an animist mode of thought, given local habitation in the mimosa tree and the soil. As a “raggedy-ass prophet” Kgositsile is a seer, enfolded in what is to be through desire.

Mphahlele reads Kgositsile’s voice, amongst others, as ‘The Voice of Prophecy in African Poetry’, as his paper is titled, and in it he identifies this voice as

both akin to oral poetry and a departure from it. Its roots lie in the public voice, the communal song and dance, in which the individual poet or performer must subordinate his talents to group interests. The evangelism of the poet as prophet and therefore as a singularly inspired individual is a departure from oral poetry. In this new role the prophetic voice hopes to be able to deal with new imperatives that arise from political upheavals, poverty, [...] exile, neo-colonialism, and so on (Mphahlele, 1979: 41).

This is what inspires Plumpp’s resolve, “this is the work of a poet hearing his own muse and inventing an original expression as medium for the oracle” (2002: 7)¹¹⁶. In the coming sections the mediating function Kgositsile becomes in the process of meaning-making will become apparent. I read Plumpp’s earlier reference to the “inner-ear” as more than just relating to the ‘senses’; but pointing to how Kgositsile ‘hears’ and ‘sees’ the oracle in those moments of evangelism, leading him to mythify the ear and the eye in his poetry. The oracle reveals the past and the future in a simultaneous present, that Kgositsile re-enchants time in his work. Black expressive cultures as a form of signification therefore do not only function to sound his poetic that derives from accumulated images, but also function to reorder time.

¹¹⁵ From ‘My Name is Afrika’ which is about restoring the god-status of Afrikans.

¹¹⁶ In the introduction of Kgositsile’s *If I Could Sing*.

He deploys Setswana proverbs, ANC and PAC slogans and songs, rap, and other forms of orality to affect space and time. He stated in our interview,

people like Max Roach, interestingly enough, would see parallels between the development of bebop and air travel. The speed with which let's say you could move now from New Orleans to New York affects or influences your sense of distance and time, so what sound can do in terms of speed then comes out at that pace in bebop, and we were the beneficiaries of that (Interview 5, 2015).

Colonial modernity 'colonized' time and the experience of it. Scholars from Latin America have interrogated this subject in those contexts. Rolando Vázquez (2010) argues that the 'colonized' were not of time units marked by capitalist modes of production. A person is born as individual-in-relation, which negates the singular and embraces relation to community, to earth, and the cosmology; relationality constitutes plural identities and interiorities. Maria Lugones also argues that colonial modernity and its "civilizing transformation justified the *colonization of memory*, and thus of people's sense of self, of intersubjective relation, of their relation to the spirit world, to land, to the very fabric of their conception of reality, identity, and social, ecological, and cosmological organization" (Lugones, 2010: 745; my emphasis). Colonial modernity thus imposed a linear progression of time that begins with the discovery of the Americas, to buttress their logic of dominance. This has direct implications on space, time, cartographies, histories and indigenous humans who were renamed and mapped.

This is the colonial antithetic order that Kgositsile opposes through his concepts of "NOW", "future memory" and "coil of time". He navigates this tension in very creative ways. The first section of this chapter explores the concept of "NOW", showing how it is coterminous with Walter Benjamin's theory of historical materialism, while simultaneously complicating and enriching it. A section that elaborates on Kgositsile's concept of "future memory" will follow, examining how 'memory' and 'desire' function in his poetics of re-enchantment. The final section will be on the "coil of time", and focuses on land as a central figure in his animist realism. It is through fidelity to servicing the land that calls him through images and sound, that he will not find peace until he realises a decolonised Afrika.

5.1 *Time is Always NOW*

In the analyses of literary works with animist features, some critics have called for “a rethinking of the linear Weberian narrative of modernity and its ‘counterpart’, the orthodox Marxist secular narrative of history” (Garuba, 2003: 269). This section focuses on Kgositsile’s concept of the “NOW”. It examines how it is used to reorder time in a manner that subverts the binary and destabilizes the hierarchy between the premodern and modern, as well as between Walter Benjamin’s historicism and historical materialism. It shows how animist logic collapses this binarism “by reabsorbing historical time into the matrices of myth and magic” (ibid: 270). The ‘myth and magic’ derives from re-enchantment through the concept of “NOW” that is coined out of the animist unconscious, and is able to fashion a “double location of time” (ibid: 280). I begin by offering Benjamin’s definitions of two historiographies, and drawing out their fusions and fissures in Kgositsile’s poetry.

Kgositsile’s coinage of the NOW moment finds cohesion with Benjamin’s (1974) notion of the “*Jetztzeit*”—or “now-time”—in which “time [is] filled by the presence of the now” (Benjamin 1974: 395). Where historicism is based on the flow of thought or homogenous universal history, Benjamin’s historical materialism is based on the arrest of thoughts: a shock that stops universal history in its tracks. That is, historical materialists possess “the awareness that they are about to make the continuum of history explode” (ibid). Historical materialism, Benjamin argues, “cannot do without the notion of a present which is not in transition ... for this notion defines the present in which he himself is writing history” (ibid: 396). Historicism, in contrast, is based on an inert chain of events. Historicism’s causality is undergirded by faith in progress, where “the tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the ‘state of emergency’ in which we live is not the exception but the rule” (ibid: 392). This way the treachery lies in depicting the oppressed as the “redeemers of future generations”, by dangling before them the prospects that things would get better because of progress.

Where historicism is marked by grand narratives and monumentalised history, “the chronicler, who recounts events without distinguishing between the great and small, thereby accounts for the truth, that nothing which has ever happened is to be given as lost to history. Indeed, the past would fully befall only a resurrected humanity. [...] *only for a resurrected humanity would its past, in each of its moment, be citable*. Each of its lived moments becomes a citation” (ibid: III; my emphasis). The present and the past are drawn into messianic relation in historical materialism to explode the continuist conception of time in

historicism. However, in Kgositsile's conception of "NOW" the past, present *and* future are contracted in a single moment that is not standing still, but ceaselessly moves on within historical time. Kgositsile's project encompasses a political desire to shape a decolonial future, and he absorbs this into animism, thus fashioning a "double location of time—its sites in nature and history" (Garuba, 2003: 280).

In functioning within modernity's monumentalized time, Kgositsile resurrects his people's humanity through citing the past, not only the big, but also the small—the macro as well as the micro; "just as flowers turn their heads towards the sun, so too does that which has been turn, by virtue of a secret kind of heliotropism, *towards* the sun which is dawning in the sky of history. To this most inconspicuous of all transformations the historical materialist must pay heed" (Benjamin, 1974: IV; original emphasis). I understand "a secret kind of heliotropism" in this context to encompass the animist unconscious, which subconsciously takes over in instructing Kgositsile's creative process. Benjamin postures, "the concept of the progress of the human race in history *is not to be separated from the concept of its progression through homogenous and empty time*. The critique of the concept of this progress must ground the basis of its critique on the concept of progress itself" (ibid: XII; my emphasis). This is not a debilitating crisis. Animism allows "the possibility of two concurrent presents and a time that is both naturalized and secularized" (Garuba, 2003: 281). The critique of "progress" can still happen within historical time through its absorption into animist reality. Europe does not have to always be "the silent referent in historical knowledge"¹¹⁷.

Animism subverts the notion that historical materialism is to be seen as antithetic to historicism. It is "imprinted with an irreducible sociality and historicity. Its spirit of constant awareness functions on a logic of inclusion rather than exclusion; its assimilative reach admits of no binarisms and therefore no contradictions in our usual sense of the words" (Garuba, 2003: 276). Kgositsile's poem 'Time' (1971: 46) demonstrates how that logic of inclusion functions,

This moment
like a tyrant strides

¹¹⁷ Garuba cites Dipash Chakrabarty's concern relating to the Third World cultures and their rationalizations erased by historical time.

across sunrise and sunset
claiming its own
panoramic view
no matter what the recorded lies

Mazisi Kunene, whose poetry consciously draws from an animist aesthetic, declares that time “refers to an eternal movement” (Kunene, 1992: 42) marked by continuity, not an external marching of hours. As such, “time is presented as treacherous, capable of retaining the shadows of our former life, and of revealing that we are always the sediment of a previous existence” (ibid). In this poem time is represented by “this moment”, which is the present moment. Time is treacherous through being personified as a tyrant, as it dictates the terms for survival when history clashes with the present—“when what you do to make your life meaningful is upset by outside forces”. Time is akin to an autocrat; the royalty of Kgositsile’s clan makes demands on him to restore their kingdom. An animist unconscious enfolds time into a NOW moment that manifests as a panorama, stretching from the past into the future. Time strides across the past (“sunrise”) and the future (“sunset”), in the present moment, projecting an image that demands of him to subvert “the recorded lies” of homogenous history. Benjamin states that articulating the past historically

means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up in a moment of danger. Historical materialism wishes to retain that image of the past which unexpectedly appears to man singled out by history at *a moment of danger*. The danger affects both the content of the tradition and its receivers. The same hangs over both: that of becoming the tool of the ruling classes. In every era the attempt must be made anew to wrest tradition away from a *conformism* that is about to overpower it (Benjamin, VI).

Kgositsile’s “this moment” does not wrest tradition away from the conformism of historicism. It absorbs conformism into the matrices of myth and magic, and historical time in a “double location of time”. Animism here “subverts the authority of Western science by reinscribing the authority of magic” within the interstices of the rational or modern (Garuba, 2003: 271). The second stanza of that poem continues,

This moment
like a tyrant strides

across Meadowlands or
Harlem streets painting
tomorrows against today's
fading moments of public hide and weep

The repetition of the lines “this moment / like a tyrant strides” is metonymic of the eternal movement of time. This derives from the indigenous archive where continuity “according to the African system of thought ... is central to all activity” (Kunene, 1992: 36). Continuity relies on movement which “is a philosophic condition that encompasses all existence” (ibid: 38). Through movement continuity is possible: “movement is descriptive of growth. Things grow in movement. It is also descriptive of rebirth...” (Kunene, 1977: 22). Kgositsile endows time with spirit, putting in dialogue two geographical loci, Meadowlands in Soweto and Harlem in New York City. The two locations are placed in powerful synthesis in a painting, which like the panorama, enfold them with Kgositsile’s ongoing becoming, all rolled up in a manifold of the present moment. Meadowlands and Harlem are between two contemporaneous presents, one in “sunrise” and the other in “sunset”. Sunrise still has sediments of night time, and sunset still has sediments of day time—light has darkness, and darkness has light. This implies that there is Meadowlands in Harlem. Kgositsile elucidates,

life does not exist in compartments, and even history and our sense of it is not linear. If we looked at anything in its totality, it is cyclic. So that it is only for purposes of analysis that we can spot this and that [...] Like even with a painting; when you look, you do not look at portions of it, you see it as a whole. It is only if you were going to critic it that you see different elements. But otherwise you see the whole picture even at a glance. I think life and human experience are like that, but we can also look at experiences which are the component part of experience (Interview 3, 2013).

Kgositsile is saying here that all components of a painting are necessary in the viewing of a painting in its totality, and draws aesthetic parallels between a painting and life experience. What is important here is that historical time in an integrated part of his life; he is living within that ordering of time. He therefore cannot wish it away in favour of a precolonial Africa. Therefore instead of disenchantment with exile, a continual re-enchantment occurs that affords him a view of his life within a totalizing horizon of experience. He emphasizes the itinerancy of time as continually lived across sunrise (past) and sunset (future), across

Meadowlands (South Africa or 'home') and Harlem (exile), by deploying jazz in the last stanza of the poem

And walks there
sidewalks with Ray Charles
Georgia on the mind
Is it not the right time!

Kgositsile plays on words, concepts, and ideologies in this last stanza. Who is walking there? Is it time the tyrant that strides sidewalks, or is it the painting or the panorama? It is all of them because they are imbued with spirit, and they all walk simultaneously on the sidewalks of Meadowlands and Harlem, in a double location of time and space. He deploys Ray Charles as a strategy to enfold himself with the itinerant phenomenal world so he too can walk the sidewalks of the two neighbourhoods. In this profound elegy to exile, Charles' song "Georgia on my mind" provides signification to a desire for return: "Georgia / a song of you / comes as sweet and clear / as moonlight through the pines / Other arms reach out to me / other eyes smile tenderly / still in peaceful dreams I see / the road leads back to you", resonates the lyrics of that song. If it is in peaceful dreams that he can embark on the road that leads home, then "Night time is the right time"—which is also a title of Charles' song.

For Kgositsile a 'dream' is not a phenomenon that happens only when he is sleeping, but also functions in the realm of a visionary/prophet. A dream in this sense also refers to its other definition—desire—which is in a constant dialogue with his mission as a political exile. Benjamin argues that for the historical materialist in the NOW or "*Jetztzeit*" moment, "thinking suddenly halts in a constellation overflowing with tensions [...] through which it crystallises as a monad. [...] In this structure he cognizes [...] a revolutionary chance in the struggle for the suppressed past" (Benjamin, 1974: XVII). The image of a constellation overflowing with tensions has been expressed by Mphahlele in his discussion of Kgositsile's voice of prophecy, where his poetic is an "expression of a sense of the *flux* of life extending from a past that is reckoned in relation to one's ancestral heritage and actual events experienced by a community, through the present to some infinite time that cannot simply be equated with the western concept of 'future'" (Mphahlele, 1979: 34; my emphasis). Mphahlele understands that voice to be necessarily grounded in an ancestral communal

heritage that goes on to inform its vision of the future. This is helpful in reading how Kgositsile is able to re-enchant historical time by absorbing it into animist realism.

He expresses Mphahlele's notion of flux and Benjamin's constellation in his 'Like the Tide: Cloudward' (1971: 61),

Turning here
Or returning there
A fractured rhythm from
The distant past makes demands

Or the image summoning
The existence of things
Or exploding the core of
The sinister rot our minds must vomit
...

Kgositsile's past makes demands of him: to re-member for continuity. Homi Bhabha describes "re-membering" as "a putting together of a dismembered past to make sense of the trauma of the present" (Bhabha, 1994: 90). This time he 'hears' a fractured rhythm. It is fractured because Kgositsile is weary of the racial pride based on "but we have rhythm" as discussed in earlier chapters. This rhythm is not something to be proud of, it is like a tyrant, dictating the "existence of things"—"rhythm don't fill a empty stomach" as he asserts in 'Towards a Walk in the Sun' (1971: 65). This is the narrative that needs to be exploded from "our" collective minds. It is the "rot" that "our minds must vomit" and purge. Kgositsile must re-member within continuist conception of time in historicism, because "the struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting", as Milan Kundera (1979) aptly puts it. Kgositsile articulates this struggle in 'The Long Reach' (1971: 71), particularly for someone who is in exile,

... How old is the tree
Whose roots have defied death!

Are the people then on the move? Moved

By the image that piles upon image
Sanctioned by the eye
Where the wind weaves this tapestry
In the song of tricontinental man

Kgositsile expands the horizon of his experience of both oppression, and of the image that summons him to Asia and Latin America—what Robert Young has called “tricontinentalism” (2001), to refer to the commonality between those three continents. Kgositsile’s ‘New Dawn’ (1971: 47) is “for afrika, asia, south & afroamerica” for instance. For these groups of people there is a precolonial history that weaves with their current political desires. The song is carried by the wind from their indigenous source, and continues to nourish their aspirations. This is his experience of exile. He thinks of “afroamerica” in this formulation within his realm of experience, and speaks of the black diaspora in natural terms. He uses the analogy of the tree to articulate familial relationships and interconnectedness with community: “if you look at the branches and leaves of the tallest tree you could think of, the leaves are that way because of the roots that are underground that you cannot see with your naked eye, but they are the ones that feed the tallest and highest branch. Diaspora in relationship to Africa is like that. The tree has gone far away from the soil but they are still fed by that” (Interview 2, 2013). He is fed by his roots in the form of images than pile upon images, and in the process of writing his mind’s eye and ear paints and sounds his poetic.

Kgositsile explicitly expresses the notion of NOW and offers a working definition of it as “the union of pastandfuture” in the poem ‘Fire Dance’ (1971: 83), which is the third poem in the four-part cluster of poems collectively called ‘Point of Departure: Fire Dance Fire Song’:

There will be no dreaming about escape
There will be no bullshit coldwar talk
 The fire burns to re-create
 the rhythms of our timeless acts
 This fire burns timeless in our
 time to destroy all nigger chains
 as real men and women emerge
 from the ruins of the rape by white greed

The rape by savages who want to control
us, memory, nature. Savages who even forge
measures to try to control time. Don't you
know time is not a succession of hours!
Time is always NOW, don't you know!
Listen to the drums. That there is a point of departure
NOW is always the time. Praise be to Charlie Parker
And it don't have nothing to do with hours

Now sing a song of NOW
A song of the union of past and future
Sing a song of blood ...
...
NOW's the time, NOW's the time

Kgositsile's short story 'Ab/original Mask' (1969) elucidates some of the seemingly coded language in the above poem, and can help demystify the symbols deployed in these instances of animist realism. In it he expresses the anguish of living in historicism's "ruins of rape by white greed", and laments the desire for escape, whether ideological or physical: "you do not try to shut your eyes to the existence of things [...] unless you want to dig your own grave. [...] When things don't jive together, when you can't dance and even the air sticks a poisoned finger at your song, it is time to create new wombs for a rebirth and come bursting out on the other side of time, dancing laughter out the wilderness" (Kgositsile, 1969: 58). The above poem expresses Kgositsile's frustration at being away from his particular site of struggle, where he experiences that he cannot 'jive' together with his diasporic brothers. He summons a 'Fire Dance', a "song of NOW". However the 'Fire Dance' is one that relies on collective vision and action; movements in dance must complement each other to express solidarity of the group. Through the recovery of history—the fire dance and the fire song—before the Middle Passage, these diasporans danced with an indigenous 'rhythm', and Kgositsile believes it still survives post slavery, latent. It can "burn to re-create the rhythm of our timeless act" and "destroy all nigger chains". Thus their fire, rhythm, song, and dance can complement that of decolonization on the continent, where a brutal fight against "white greed" can be waged.

The song and rhythms from the indigenous archive is forgotten in the diaspora, or does not roar with the might of generations. Kgositsile believes it lies latent in its people, as long as they re-member the “song of blood” and not march along historicisms time that has “to do with hours”. That history starts with their rape and ruin and that of their song and dance. They must ‘see’ history in its total horizon because the song and dance that existed before the rupture of colonial modernity needs new wombs for rebirth. The concerns expresses in that first stanza found elaboration in Kgositsile article ‘Where is the Black Revolution’, published in the *Black World* of May 1970, in which he wrote,

With all the militant talk about Revolution and Nationalism and Black Power, why is there no evidence, past words, of actual Black Power? Why is there more negro confusion than Black revolutionary action? If our clarity about the world we live in, or want to build, can be measured by what we do—and it can—then we lack clarity. And until we have this clarity we will continue to live as slaves dependent on crumbs, economic and political, from the white world—be we in South African, Kenya, Ghana, Jamaica or the United States. There is no doubt, for instance, that if the brothers and sisters talking about the Republic of New Africa were as serious, fearless and as determined as the Vietnamese, the liberation struggle in the United States would have been raised to an unprecedented level. But when a Republic of New Africa representative tells us that the new nation (the RNA was declared independent in March, 1968) will continue to pay U.S. taxes, I smell Bantustan mentality. After all, as far as white America is concerned, niggers can call themselves whatever they will as long as their allegiance to America remains intact (Kgositsile, 1970: 17).

The fiery language of the first stanza is informed by frustration about the formation of the RNA, which Kgositsile only perceives as “dreaming about escape” and “bullshit coldwar talk”. The RNA was “a black nationalist organization that was created in 1969 on the premise that an independent black republic should be created out of the southern United States of South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana, which were considered ‘subjugated lands’”¹¹⁸. He endows fire with a spirit that is “both simultaneous and coterminous” with its natural properties in that stanza. Fire has the forces of destruction and construction. Fire helps to destroy and to mould together, like a smelter that deconstructs

¹¹⁸ <http://www.blackpast.org/aah/republic-new-africa-1968>

metal for it to be constructed into something else of value. In this poem he proclaims that “the fire burns to re-create the rhythm of our timeless act”. As such, he uses fire to dismantle historical time, while simultaneously deploying that fire to mould it with revolutionary action for the future. That is, he reabsorbs historical time into the matrices of myth and magic.

The second stanza addresses the colonisation of nature, memory and time¹¹⁹. It is a violent act of acculturation, and a savage violation of the body and psyche. Under the auspices of the civilizing project the colonizer dis/figured the natives as barbaric and savages who needed to be enlightened and educated. By referring to *them* as savages Kgositsile reverses the colonial gaze and labels “white greed” as savages in their approach of trying to control people’s relations with their past and with their environment. The violence and arrogance of extricating people from their way of living and turning them into commodities measured by their production is an act of savagery. Colonialism’s modernity entrenches its logic of domination through statements such as ‘before civilization the natives were lazy, ahistorical, and superstitious savages’, justifying the colonizing project. Kgositsile overthrows this projected narrative of ahistorical Africans through utilising a living past to inform the desires for a liberated future.

He views the past as living and not lived, and this informs the lines, “listen to the drums, that there is a point of departure”, which expresses that drums are our past but have found continuity in the circle, in this ‘fire dance’. The drums are a point of departure, and drawn into relation with the future. He uses an ingenious reference to Charlie Parker’s song titled ‘The Time is Now’ to both demonstrate how drums, like the past, are living in memory and are iterative in this “fire song”, entering the realm of the present and future. This is in contrast to, for instance, the drums of Négritude’s glorious past. Similarly, drums, usually deployed to represent mythical Africa by diasporans, are here tied into a materialising history into the future through modern signification of jazz. Drums are significant for their role in any form of ceremony as they also enfold the realm of the ancestors in the NOW moment. They can also induce a trance, enabling one to see events that will happen in future, but when one relates them to someone it sounds like one is remembering a memory of the future. NOW

¹¹⁹ Scholars from Latin America have interrogated this subject in those contexts, as flagged by Rolando Vázquez (2011) in the opening of this essay. Maria Lugones (2010) argues that colonial modernity and its “civilizing transformation justified the *colonization of memory*, and thus of people’s sense of self, of intersubjective relation, of their relation to the spirit world, to land, to the very fabric of their conception of reality, identity, and social, ecological, and cosmological organization” (745; my emphasis).

therefore encompasses all times. It is “the union of past and future”. Praises are given to drums, represented by Charlie Parker, because when other diasporic figures are dreaming of escape, they/he are/is able to re-enchant the world.

5.2 *Future Memory*

‘Future memory’ is a concept that Kgositsile coined to transgress the boundaries of historicism’s chain of events, and transpose it into animist realism. He alludes to this in his definition of memory (1978),

I would say memory sometimes in my usage might be misunderstood. In English, memory is something static. It is something you remember in terms of looking back at another period. In my usage, memory is more an assimilated aspect of your every day living and thinking. In that sense, memory can be, or it is, all time—i.e., it is past, it is present, it is future, too¹²⁰.

In the Oxford English Dictionary the definition of ‘memory’ is something remembered from the past, a past that has been lived. In Kgositsile’s usage of the term, ‘memory’ is not lived but *living*. Memory is assimilated in the union of “past and future”. In that union, the future enfolds as opposed to unfold. The future is grounded in the possibilities of recovering the past. As such the past can be ‘in front of you’, making the future mnemonic. This perception of memory is attributed to the indigenous mode of thought, where, in animist cultures, movement and continuity are principal forces of life, whereby nothing ever dies, but continues to exist in different realms and dimensions. Kgositsile absorbs these magical or animist features into present time through his concept of future memory. Garuba (2003) elucidates,

animist culture thus opens up a whole new world of poaching possibilities, *prepossessing the future*, as it were, by laying claim to what in the present is yet to be invented. It is on account of this ability to prepossess the future that continual re-enchantment becomes possible (271; my emphasis).

¹²⁰ Rowell, C (1978). ‘With Bloodstains to Testify’: An interview with Keorapetse Kgositsile. *Callaloo*, Issue 2, pp 31

Kgositsile offers his explanation of future memory,

When we say someone is visionary or prophetic, what we mean is that they can see past the imposed boundaries. What that would mean, the closest scientific way, is that they are, at a conceptual level, able to analyse a number of different things all at the same time at the speed at which it happens in a dream. Therefore they might see *there*, before others do. And when they talk about it they would be remembering what they saw *there* (Interview 2013).

Remembering what you saw in the future is here packaged as ‘future memory’. In his rumination Kgositsile postures himself the visionary whose undertakings he outlines. In his exploratory writing process the accumulated images present themselves at the speed at which things happen in a dream, where reality is not restricted by conventional logic and rationalization. The events “flash up” in “constellations”, to use Benjamin’s words, and the animist unconscious inform his handling of language in interpreting those images.

Kgositsile’s ‘The Air I Hear’ (1971: 19) elucidates this concept,

The air, I hear,
froze to the sound
searching. And my memory
present and future tickles
the womb like the pulse
of this naked air
in the eye of a tear
drop. ...
... But my memory
defiant like the sound of pain
rides the wave at dawn
in the marrow of the desert
palm: stands looking still
and the bitter shape
of yesterdays weaves
timeless tomorrows
in the leaves

of laughter larger than
singular birth ...

Kgositsile is describing a writing process where he seizes hold of an image. The image of the past “tickles the womb like the pulse of this naked air in the eye of a tear drop”. In this pregnant moment of explorative writing, the womb is endowed with the spirit of re/production and pro/creation, and is tickled by an image of the past as it “weaves timeless tomorrows”. He experiences a sense of flux in that moment of illumination, and the process of writing becomes the process of re-calling the future.

In the poem, memory pulsates in present time, giving birth to tomorrows, experienced through the mythic eye of a tear drop: the memory of pain enfolds the desire for tomorrow’s laughter, turning tears of pain to tears of joy, a twin force that is part of the birthing process. Here western rationality’s limited definition and perception of the eye is also wrested and re-enchanted to signify a mode of perception that is not limited to visual perception, but transcends it to become a non-sensory experience of reality. The image of the past that flashes enfolded with the future in Kgositsile’s moment of pain observes him through the eye of a teardrop, as he observes it. The eye in his tear is looking at him, while also revealing an image for his eye to look at. The observer is the observed, and this moment of pain is pregnant with desire for laughter in the future; that memory of the future is what propels his poetic, as he pens it, remembering the future: future memory.

With regards to re-enchanting the eye, Kunene would argue that “the subjective appearance of things is less philosophically significant in the African context than is the idea of things as essences, as entities that exist in and for themselves, whether or not an observer is present” (Kunene, 1992: 42). That is, the perception of the human experience of the world as possible through five senses prioritises humans as the measure of all things, as well as denies the world its agency. It reduces reality to smell, sight, taste, touch, and the audible, thus projecting onto nature a limited humans functions informed by western rational thinking. In the above poem for example, the ‘object’ world is spiritualized: he hears the air, living and pulsating, and tickling his womb of desire impregnated by memory—he observes this as it observes him. Note how he signals this in the distinguished articulations of “the air I hear” in the title, and “the air, I hear” in the first line. The air is vital to those phenomena. In western

logic, the air, for instance, cannot hear because the air has no agency¹²¹. This would then be considered personification by that system, but that is not what Kgositsile is doing.

Personification itself is limited as it is still anthropomorphic. As Kunene aptly points out,

When Western writers use personification, they accord human qualities to non-human objects. For instance, they might refer to the branches of a tree as arms, thereby describing a non-animate thing as if it were operating in human terms. In contrast, personification in the African tradition embraces the tree as it is as well as the idea of a tree as a phenomenon in its own right (1992: 41).

In rigidly dividing reality between the physical and spiritual, the ‘I’ and the world, western rational thinking positioned humans as superior to other non-human living forms. In that system the notion of ‘future memory’ is unintelligible because time marches external to human life and has no agency. In animist realism, “‘meaning’ is proposed as the site of *interaction* and exchange” (Garuba, 2003: 279). Physicist Karen Barad would revise and argue for *intra-action* instead of interaction: when entities *interact* they each pre-exist independently from one another, and maintain that level of independence. When they *intra-act* they materialize through their co-constitutive entanglement, and the ability to act emerges from within the relationship not outside of it (Barad, 2007). In this poem Kgositsile is able to observe the image of the future as it also observes him, and within this relationship his poetic emerges. Through this relationship,

the foundational Cartesian *cogito* of Enlightenment rationality is reversed and revised in such a way that *meaning* [...] is now seen as central to consciousness because it is meaning that stands between man and the object world and between man and other men, in the gender-free sense of [its] usage (Garuba, 2003: 279; original emphasis).

Kgositsile’s process of making meaning is therefore owed to the animist unconscious that incorporates the interrelated physical and spiritual observations in order to grasp the totality of meaning. These observations “require the sacred word to describe and integrate according to the sacred order of the universe”, as Kunene would argue (1992: 29). The sacred word is a

¹²¹ Tsitsi Jaji’s concept of “synaesthesia” (2009) is here echoed, where sound can be seen and images heard. However I am arguing for how these sensory experiences are absorbed in an animist reality, and become agential as they are being experienced by Kgositsile.

manifestation of the spiritualization of the object world. To speak of desire, for instance, is to speak of memory; they are twin forces. 'Desire' is an articulation of a memory of the future. This is exemplified in his 'Recreation' (1971: 74),

...

To move towards
laughter has always been my desire
So here now knowing what
you should do you must do
right now, I laugh
moved by the memory
of hate and guns and love
moved by my son's memory
whose face is yet to be born
in the name of the act
triggered by us when we know
armed peace is an act of love
rhythm
is
this,
and clarity. The face
in my head remembering
more than I will ever know,
and the eye out there before
the hand, feeling the thens and
whys of yesterdays without laughter,
knowing the fire of today's how,
clasps the gun
that will set me free

Moving towards laughter is a desire of the future woven with "whys of yesterday without laughter". It is a desire to move towards laughter and love that is experienced woven with "the memory of hate and guns". Towards this desire he shall move because the image of "my son's memory whose face is yet to be born" flashes in his mind and demands revolutionary

action—“in the name of the act triggered by us”. The memory of his unborn son observes him armed with hate and guns, reminding him of history’s pain, and also ‘telling’ him that perhaps that is the recourse to laughter. He cannot have peace for his peace is an image observing him, armed. “Armed peace is an act of love” because it never lets him forget—time is a tyrant. The restless image rouses him to action, “remembering more than I will ever know”. The “the face in [his] head” observes him, and “clasps the gun” “before [his] hand” can in real time. The arms that the hand must co-opt demand “the act” and the future is accessed in that moment. The play on words with “armed” and “hand” is Kgositsile articulating modernist desires into animist realism. The itinerant now-time taunts his peace, armed, and lets him know that there is no peace without the clasping of the gun that will set him free. In freeing himself the ‘dream’ of his son’s face born out of this triggered act in a decolonial future will be realised.

Within the oxymoron “armed peace” echoes Kgositsile’s similar illuminating paradox, “armed struggle is an act of love” (‘Red Song’, 1990). He aligns himself with other revolutionaries, such as both Paulo Freire and Che Guevara¹²², who around the same time infused revolutionary talk with deep feelings of love. In his *Venceremos* Guevara declared, “the true revolutionary is guided by strong feelings of love. It is impossible to think of an authentic revolutionary without this quality” (1969: 398). Freire elaborates on this concept in his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, “to exist, humanly, is to *name* the world, to change it. Once named, the world in its turn reappears to the namers as a problem and requires of them a new *naming*. ... The naming of the world, which is an act of creation and re-creation, is not possible if it is not infused with love” (Freire, 1970: 88; original emphasis). Kgositsile names the world and re-orders it in order to change it, as the title of the above poem ‘Recreation’¹²³ testifies. He is recreating the world, propelled by the face of a new generation yet to be born. The desire to overthrow white supremacy is fuelled by the image of the past which informs the future. Freire offers, “the revolution is made by people to achieve their humanization. What, indeed, is the deeper motive which moves individuals to become revolutionaries, but

¹²² Kgositsile was inspired by Guevara, and compared Duma Nokwe with that revolutionary in his ‘A Luta Continua’: “there are men, Che said, / who find their hereafter / among the people / life and victory as you knew / and lived it in all the names / *that in dying for life / make life surer than death* / will continue to spring and flower / ...” (Kgositsile in Plumpp, 1982. Original emphasis). This is how a true revolutionary is guided by strong feelings of love; he dies for life, making life surer than death, and by so doing finding his hereafter among the people whose humanity he achieved. Kgositsile is part of those people in this poem that gives Nokwe his hereafter.

¹²³ In the revised version published in *If I Could Sing* (2002) the title is spelt as ‘Re/creation’.

the dehumanization of people” (Freire, 1970: 89)? Love is a vehicle that enables Kgositsile to ‘recreate’ for the future. The ‘re’ prefix suggests re-calling the future in the process of (re)production.

5.3 *Coil of Time*

Kgositsile coined the phrase “coil of time” to unify ‘pastpresentfuture’. If memory does not mean looking back to another period, but is in all times, enfolding the past with the future in the NOW, then Kgositsile deploys the coil to enfold time. A coil emanates and contracts all these times into one moment. It absorbs and weaves memory and desire in his process of meaning-making produced *through* intra-action. The Latin origins of the word ‘coil’ is the act of ‘gathering together’, and Kgositsile uses this concept to transform reality by naming it through recreation and reconfiguration. He ties himself too in the coil, which gathers him in a fold of all times, producing meaning within that relationship, not outside of it. As he puts it, “perhaps a way into things like / memory could be just / a coil around time” (1971: 25). This signals the materialization of ideas in Kgositsile’s world; “this habit of giving a concrete dimension to abstract ideas [is] normal practice” within animist cultures (Garuba, 2003: 273). Recreating reality through naming is itself a revolutionary act that draws from a specific cultural reservoir transgress modernity’s imposed boundaries. Recreating comes out of desire, out of love, and memory informs that act as both are gathered in a coil, with desire produced through its iterative enfolding with memory. The poem ‘Like the Tide: Cloudward’ elucidates,

... But
Words, be they elegant
As verse or song
Robust and piercing as sunshine
Or hideous memories of our
Cowardice in bondage are meaningless unless
They be the coil around our desire and method
Or the “most competent rememberer.” ...

The act of naming is necessary, and Kgositsile revisits the past in naming the world through dismantling language and deploying the mythic eye and ear to see and hear from the cultural

reservoir of Setswana. Here emerges the “most competent rememberer” whose coil is the way into things, past and future. The following poem ‘My Name is Afrika (For Nqabeni Mthimkhulu)’ demonstrates the application of ‘coil of time’ used to re-enchant the world through “gathering together” revolutionary movements on the continent and its diaspora:

All things come to pass
When they do, if they do
All things come to their end
When they do, as they do
So will the day of the stench of oppression
Leaving nothing but the lingering
Taste of particles of hatred
Woven around the tropical sun
While in the belly of the night
Drums roll and peal a monumental song
To every birth its blood
All things come to pass
When they do
We are the gods of our day and us
Panthers with claws of fire
And songs of love for the newly born
There will be ruins in Zimbabwe for real
Didn't Rap say,
They used to call it Detroit
And now they call it Destroyed!
To every birth its pain
All else is death or life

In a manner of contextualizing, it is important to note that this poem first appeared in Kgositsile's first collection *Spirits Unchained* (1969), and the title of the poem would become the title of his third collection *My Name is Afrika* (1971). It marks a watershed moment in Kgositsile's life and career. The poem is dedicated to Nqabeni Mthimkhulu, the second Chimurenga leader of the Zimbabwean anti-colonial movement, in solidarity with his political strife, which was in tandem with the neighbouring African National Congress'

(ANC) armed struggle against apartheid. In that Zimbabwean War of Liberation, which was a joint operation between uMkhonto we Sizwe (MK) and the Zimbabwean People's Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA), Chris Hani led the MK into Zimbabwe in a declaration of solidarity with their neighbours against white settlers in both countries. Kgositsile gathers those revolutions informed by the same aspirations together in a coil. Kgositsile also employs the coil to enfold diasporic liberation movements: the Student Nonviolence Coordinating Committee, or SNCC, of which Kgositsile was a member, led by Rap Brown, who is referenced as Rap in the poem; and the Black Panthers, signified in the line "panthers with claws of fire".

There are movements in the coil, converging and diverging, and Kgositsile is interested in the convergence. Movement in this poem is interpreted in multiple ways: the political movements of the ANC, MK, Black Panthers, ZIPRA, and SNCC; the movement of exilic figures; the movement of nature, its ecologies, cosmologies, and planetary activities; and the convergence of those movements materializing in a coil, emanating into one another in their aspirations. Kgositsile ropes all those revolutionary movements with the movements of nature, and they are put in a congealed agency where meaning is produced within their co-constitutive becoming. This way the revolution is inevitable because, as evident in nature, "all things come to pass". This moment calls for "songs of love for the newly born" decolonised Africa, and liberated black people, because the desire of revolution is informed by love and its fulfilment achieved for the humanization of the people. All the mentioned revolutionary movements are gathered into dialogue within a double location of time—"a time that is at once naturalized and denaturalized" (Garuba, 2003: 280), in nature and in the future. Kgositsile's desire to split time's skull is here realised; he at once re-enchants the seemingly fixed geography and its spaces and time, and absorbs them into an animist reality.

Kgositsile consciously spells 'Afrika' with a 'k'. He tells his contemporaries that there are settlers in South Africa, "*Afrikaaner*, which they call themselves. It means *African*; it is Dutch for *African*. Although they resent and despise Africans, and oppress and exploit them, the Whites decided to call themselves *Afrikaaners*. Yet they never refer to *Africans* as *Africans*. They are either *Natives*, *Bantus*, or Kaffirs". They did not only "rename them, but [they] condemn them in the renaming. In the same manner that you were talking about Africans that were brought to this country [...] how did it come about that all of a sudden *Africans* became *Negroes*" (Kgositsile in Rowell, 1978: 26)? To proclaim 'My Name is

Afrika' is therefore a retrieval of history pre-modernity's colonialism to fashion a decolonial future. Or, as stated in 'Flirtation', "AFRICA, the stench of absence / AFRIKA, the fragrance of rebirth" (1971: 50).

Afrika in Motshekga's conception of 'Afuraka' before the Bantu migrations has the following etymology as discussed in Chapter Three: "A meaning land, Fura/Far meaning the king, sun and god, ka meaning my" (Motshekga, 2007: 4). 'Afrika' is 'my land of the sun', 'sun god', or what Kgositsile calls "The Sun Valley" (Kgositsile, 1969)¹²⁴. The anti-colonial wars exemplified by the ANC and ZIPRA will leave "nothing but the lingering taste of particles of hatred woven around the tropical sun". Colonialism did not only threaten erasure of his identity informed by the living land, but also threatened to arrest his spiritual development. This is evident in the condemnation of the native as 'heathen' (literal meaning of *kaffir*). 'My Name is Afrika' is thus an urgent call to fight for the land.

The lines "All things come to pass / when they do, as they do / we are the god of our day" privilege nature's position in providing the mediator/meaning between all living sentients. 'Gods' represents both. In animist cultures the micro and macro all constitute life—there is the entire rain in one drop, there is an entire lineage in a one's blood¹²⁵, and there is god in all living things, big or small. The human in Setswana, Sepedi and Sesotho constitutes 'morithi', which is a shadow that the physical body manifests; and 'seriti', which, as a flame, does not have a shadow but represents the spirit, the life force, which underpins human dignity and connectivity with lineage. All these are gathered by the sacred land, and Kgositsile uses the image of the coil to represent that. It is not unusual to hear a child being referred to as "mother" or "grandmother" because it is believed the child symbolises rebirth of the mother or grandmother. Similarly, it is not unusual to hear men in the community refer to each other as "morena"/"nkosi", or 'god', in their daily interactions. In Chapter Three we read how *Motswasele II*'s Moruakgomo is tasked by the community to kill the king—"go ba direla serena", literally meaning 'to restore the community to their godly stature'. Gods¹²⁶ are also "badimo", a literal translation of 'ancestors'. The land is a living womb in whose agency we

¹²⁴ In his short story 'Ab/original Masks' (*Negro Digest*, October 1969: 55).

¹²⁵ Sentiment presented in 'The Gods Wrote' (1971: 68), which is discussed in Chapter Three.

¹²⁶ See also the poem 'The Gods Wrote', whose first stanza relies of the natural world and its poetics to connect with the ancestors: "we are breath of drop of rain, / grain of seasand in the wind / we are root of baobab, / flesh of this soil, / blood of Congo brush, elegant as breast of dark cloud / or milk flowing through the groaning years" (Kgositsile, 1971: 68).

find our own. Therefore land must be protected with blood for the dignity of the people, and their continuity.

From intra-acting with nature, this meaning emerges: to every birth its blood. Blood represents twin forces: death and birth, endings and beginnings, pain and joy, and birth and rebirth. There shall be blood sacrificed for the purposes of a revolution—"names that in dying for life / make life surer than death" (1975: 14)—for purposes of rebirth. Kgositsile's poetry is a platform for those names. Nature's poetic offers him solace about death. In an 'Epitaph for Can Themba' he cites he hears Countee Cullen's 'Epitaph: For my grandmother', a four-line poem that reads, "This lovely flower fell to seed. / Work gently, sun and rain— / She held it as her dying creed / That she would grow again" (Cullen, 1925). The lovely flower that falls to seed represents the one who has passed on, and also recalls the Mimosa leaves that fall and fertilize the soil. However, their passing is not the end as their flower fell to seed, and that seed will grow again. Those who die integrate with the sacred earth and become part of the elements continue to live on other realms. And Kgositsile's poetry shows how those realms 'visit' him in the animist unconscious. He hears them and sees them, and they advice him and 'instruct' his poetic.

Central to these phenomena of movement and continuity in cycles like nature is the sacred land. To strive to be 'gods of our days' also refers to the related meaning of 'gods' in Setswana: ancestors. They are intricately tied to the land. They are born in a land and their umbilical cord is buried in it; so shall they return to the same land, signalling growth of generations through the movement of time. Therefore land must be protected with blood for the dignity of the people, and their continuity: "to every birth its blood". The blood of birth is the blood of joy and pain, and of beginnings and endings. It is the blood of death too, for birth is rites of passage where the old dies and the new begins: birth and rebirth of the newly born and of those who parent it, respectively. It is an act of love, as is revolutionary action. Mongane Serote appropriated this line as the title of his first novel, *To Every Birth its Blood* (1981), which tackles the same concerns about land. Land, according to Kgositsile (1974), represents "the coil through and around our soul and soil" (9). Land is therefore re-enchanted to reflect the ways it informs all activities and determinations on physical and spiritual dimensions.

Karen Barad's example of "rings of trees" helps elucidate Kgositsile's "coil of time" from a subatomic point of view, and the two concepts find parallels within Kgositsile's "mother's womb and earth's bowels". The rings of trees, according to Barad, "mark the sedimented history of their intra-actions within and as part of the world, so matter carries within itself the sedimented historialities of the practices through which it is produced as part of its ongoing becoming" (Barad, 2007: 180). The sedimented historialities are living, not lived, and they are ingrained and also enriched in matter's becoming. The making and marking of time is lively material process of enfolding. The rings of trees are cycles spacing out, in a non-linear fashion, enfolded with the source which can be traced back to a seed many cycles ago, ad infinitum. This is precisely how Kgositsile understand continuity as being central to all activity, with the emanating cycles marking time as lively and not passive or external to human life. The poem 'In the Mourning' (1974) articulates these ideas,

And at the door of the eye
is the still voice of the land.
My father before my father
knew the uses of fire
my father before my father,
with his multiple godhead,
sat on a circular stool
after the day was done. At times even
between the redness of two suns,
knowing that time was not born yesterday.
The circle continues
time will always be
in spite of minutes that know no life.
...
There are cycles in the circle
I may even moan my deadness
or mourn your death
in this sterile moment of asking:
Where is the life we came to live?
Time will always be
Pastpresentfuture is always now

Where then is the life we came to live?

The animist unconscious is at work here. The eye is mythified to signal the agential nature of the land observing Kgositsile the observed. The land is re-enchanted, and its voice is still. There is something ominous about the silence of a living land. The land beckons him to soar above adversity, and in the process help it ‘soar’ above its own occupation by colonizers. It is beckoning him to remember the uses of “fire” to create and re-create—to destruct in order to construct. In the coil of time he can find the uses of fire pre-modernity’s erasure, and can use that memory to fight for his forefathers’ land and fashion a future. The statement “my father before my father knew the uses of fire” casts Kgositsile in the continuity of this knowledge as a father in this time, for the purpose of his ‘son’ who will be a father of his own time because “the circle continues”: desire for decoloniality. These concepts point to how magical elements of thought from mythological narratives from Setswana and other southern African experiential observer-observed relations with nature continually assimilate new developments (Garuba, 2003: 267). Kgositsile’s father “with his multiple godhead” sitting on a “circular stool” is a powerful image. The “multiple godhead” signifies continuous enfolding of the cycles or seasons in the continuing circle, and the circular stool, no doubt made from a tree trunk or branch, evokes Barad’s metaphor of rings of trees. Kgositsile is a ring in a tree, and its sedimenting historicities ingrain and enrich his ongoing becoming, where meaning is made within that process of spacing out.

Kunene argues, similarly to Mphahlele, that the language that can be accessed in the cumulative moment that Kgositsile’s poetic materializes out of is “the language of the diviners” (1992: 41). This language “is esoteric and obscure”, but

The African poet seeks to make obscure symbols and esoteric language accessible to the majority of the people by continuously integrating art with philosophy. Having acquired the necessary reflective discipline to grasp the complex, multi-layered symbols of the divine language, he is *constantly* alert to the dual meaning of the universe (ibid; original emphasis).

The constant consciousness of the dual meaning of the universe has been demonstrated through the trope of the eye deployed to signal the observer-observed relationship, as well as in the destroy/create, death/birth, end/beginnings, and pain/joy functions. In the title of the

poem ‘In the Mourning’ Kgositsile re-enchants ordinary language and *translates* the cumulative image that calls him from ‘mourning’ to ‘morning’. Morning would suggest a new day, a new dawn, rebirth, and fresh hope. Until the land is unoccupied there is mourning. The land should necessarily also be understood as earth since in Setswana the word for land is ‘lefatshe’—land, earth, and world—signalling land that is not quantified by colonial cartography. The absorption of the modernity’s colonialism and capitalism within an animist reality also rejects the mapping of the land’s people. Consider the conception of land as articulated by Kgositsile in this assertion:

In Setswana, as in other African languages, there is no word for *citizen*. We speak of *moagi*, resident. ‘*Go agisana/agisanya*,’ from *aga*, from which *moagi* is derived, means, ‘in the same breath’, ‘building together’ and/or ‘living together in harmony or peace’ (Kgositsile, 2004, 149).

There is no word for citizen because there is no word for country, in the nation state sense. There are those who build together and live together, in the same breath, which connotes place, belonging, and communality. The nation boundaries created linguistic boundaries, but through the animist unconscious, Kgositsile is able to re-enchant colonial cartography through a revolutionary slogan. ‘Mayibuye iAfrika’ is an isiZulu title that Kgositsile uses to gesture to an Afrika (with a ‘k’ to signal restoration),

like the memories
of fatherless black children
become fathers of desire
in fox-holes before
they are old enough to build
cattle by the riverbank

the dancing road
uncoils in the ear
pierced by the finger
of the slender smile
of tight roots ... these
retrieved eyes across the tight

belly of a pregnant drum
these are the words
of an ancient dancer of steel
—the children of a person
share the head of a locust—
and who cannot say
life is
an unfolding proverb
woven around
the desire of the memory
of the belly dance
...
... this morning
the sun wakes up
laughing with the sharp-edge
birth of retrieved root
nimble as dream
translated memory rides
past and future alike

Kgositsile uses isiZulu phrasing to call back the land. The title derives from a revolutionary call for action that translates to ‘bring back Afrika’, or ‘let Afrika come back’, which was an ANC and PAC slogan that incited anti-apartheid and anti-colonial aspirations to fight white settler communities off the continent. It is used as a call-and-response during rallies or any type of gathering, and can even be used as a greeting from comrade to comrade. The call “mayibuye” could simply be used to illicit the response “iAfrika”, and vice versa, between two people as a greeting of solidarity. It is very much oral and aural. The saying therefore has its own values that articulate a united vision for decolonization, collective aspirations, spiritual wellbeing, and collective identity. It is deployed as a form of divination, where Kgositsile relies on their oral and aural characteristics in his evangelism. Sounds, he postulates, is key to ritual; “ritual relies on sound, on the music of the language, than on anything else, in pretty much the same way that rituals are carried through sound” (Interview 6, 2015). This slogan respects no linguistic or cartographic boundaries, and may be heard in the anti-colonial struggles of most southern African countries.

The reverence of land is the reverence of its constant power in the shaping of their ontology, epistemology, integrity, wealth, and continuity. The coil of time accounts for the infinite generative force emanating from the land, and it weaves a tapestry of desire and memory through an ancient unfolding song that calls forth its people to fight for the land's wellbeing as it is essentially tied to their own. In their book *Bringing Plaatjie Back Home: 'Re-storying the African and Batswana Sensibilities in his Oeuvre'* (2015), Sekepe Matjila and Karen Hare contend, "the significance of land [is] *fertility, reproduction, and continuity* in the Batswana sensibilities [...] Nature has been a balm and nourisher of the soul. [...] Nature evokes the presence, power, and care of the creator. Thus nature and land appeal to the higher sensibilities, to soul. When a person *soars*, there is a possibility of *rising above adversity*" (Matjila and Hare, 2015: 85-92; own emphasis). I want to suggest that fertility and reproduction is also related to economy so that land does not only represent political, physical and spiritual wellbeing, but also economical. The root word 'eco', also from 'ecology' connotes 'home' or 'house' in its Greek origins—a place for relationships and interrelations, which is why capitalism is an incompatible economy within that agrarian ecosystem. 'Eco' is about communality, society and collective wellbeing, while capitalist modes of production are focused on profit and individual success.

The drum is pregnant and has 'eyes' that are staring at Kgositsile, presenting to him a road, his journey—his father and his father's father's journey. Their journeys accumulate to uncoil in his eye and ear, and the message is aural in nature in the form of the "unfolding proverb" against the backdrop of the sound of drums. The image accompanied by sonic messages is a tapestry "woven around the desire of the memory of the belly dance". The belly dance is a dance that is in sync with the sound that the pregnant drum makes, connected through the word "pregnant" and "belly". The roots of the tree are tight, even in the diaspora, feeding the image that is clear as his mother, the "ancient dancer of steel" (her totem 'mosadi-mmina-tshipi'), expressed in the form of a Tswana proverb: "the children of a person share the head of a locust", or 'bana ba motho ba kgaogana tlhogo ya tsie', which expresses the concept of interrelations and interconnectivity. The communal activities of drumming and dancing further reinforces this determination to see Afrika free, for the physical, spiritual and political wellbeing of the community ("fatherless black children"), the restoration of its languages (mother's Tswana totem and proverb), its cosmos ("this morning the sun wakes up laughing"), and the well-being of its livestock ("cattle by the riverbank"): the totality of

Afrika restored. And because Kgositsile understand liberation in natural terms, ‘Mayibuye iAfrika’ is ultimately the restoration and reparation of a living ecology whose harmony is our harmony.

5.4 Conclusion

This chapter’s main concern was time, and how Kgositsile re-enchants it through his concepts of “NOW”, “future memory”, and “coil of time”, informed by an animist conception of reality attributed to the indigenous resource base from southern Africa. Through a continually enfolding animist unconscious he deployed the trope of the eye and ear to signal the image of the past that he intra-acts with in the process of writing, but also the oral and aural nature of that archive. He signified these through a range of black expressive cultures including jazz, proverbs, drums, political slogans, songs, even opening areas of feeling and meaning making through Ray Charles’ lyrics. He puts both sounds and images of the past in animist realities by spiritualizing premodern object such as spears, drums, mystics masks, and fire, and absorbing them into historical time in their modern manifestation: the spear being put side by side with a shotgun; drums deployed in their past role and also used as modern signification through Charlie Parker; the mystic mask birthing a self-born guerrilla; and fire deployed for ceremony as well as for dismantling nigger chains. This way Kgositsile shows that historicism and historical materialism do not necessarily have to occupy binary positions. Through transposing a historiography of historicism within an animist reality, the binary is subverted, and a double location of time is achieved. This way Kgositsile’s poetic shows how the transgression of boundaries and identities can be accomplished without escaping the realities of history marching forward ceaselessly.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

The ancient ones plait their stories into the futures of their children
The ancient ones they use their hands to heal the backs of broken men
(Mashile, 2005: 53)

This chapter concludes the narrative of the role of Setswana in Kgositsile's poetry. That language is the thread that ties all the chapters. Its genealogies have been mapped in Chapter Two, which situates the matriarch Madikeledi as the protector of her lineage and cultural inheritance, which she passed on to Kgositsile. In the political climate of her times, it had become blatantly clear that the powers that be wish to acculturate the natives and distance them not only from their traditions and cultures, but also from themselves. Her choice to ban the English language in her household was political as much as it was about creating links with the past for purposes of social cohesion. From this foundation a young Kgositsile emerged.

A key moment in Kgositsile's development as a writer was his high school teacher, Tswana novelist D.P. Monyaise, whose literary works continue to enjoy scholarly attention to date. Through his passion for the language's poetic bearing, he created an environment to think creatively through that language. Under his tutorship Kgositsile started thinking about the written component of the language, and started to read Tswana literature more vigorously. Kgositsile cites Monyaise in his meditations upon return to South Africa after thirty years in exile, when he expresses pride in still being able to communicate in his mother tongue after so long. This makes him take a resolve to revisit Monyaise's literary work for purposes of translating them. The interaction with Tswana literature is a principal factor that informs the arguments this dissertation make. By the time Kgositsile left for exile at age twenty three, he considered that literature so valuable that he packed them and carried them across the Atlantic with him, considering them his most valuable movable property. They functioned to nourish his emergence as a writer of great stature in the Afro-American literary scene.

6.1 The Ancients Say...

By manner of concluding, I wish to revisit the strategy Kgositsile deploys when drawing wisdom from the oral and written Setswana archive, and synthesise it to emphasize his cultural and political commitment in his oeuvre. As seen in Chapter Three, when he

strategically transforms the primary archive through translating proverbs, he prefixes them with the phrase “the ancients say”. This approach has many implications in our reading of his work. To cite the ‘ancients’ is an act of subverting and undermining the tyranny of slavery, colonialism, apartheid, and western cultural imperialism. According to the Oxford English Dictionary (OED), the word ‘ancient’ relates to the archaic, which speaks of the “obsolete, anachronistic, outmoded, bygone, antiquated, antediluvian, no longer in use, past its prime” and relates to “referring to earlier primitive time”. It refers to the ‘pre-historic’—an addendum that is premised on modernity’s knowledge production and value system supported by its linear conception of time that presents a singular history with a starting date. What the ancients say is therefore a mode of knowledge production devalued and erased by modernity’s episteme. It is undermined and bulldozed by modernity’s brutal force, and flattened out of existence, in order for a new project of homogeneous history to be sown on the plantations of modernity’s colonialism and slavery.

To refer to the ancients is to refer to the ancestors, through the shared root word. Another realm of existence bludgeoned by modernity’s bulldozer, ancestors in southern African cultures are experienced as living, and in constant entanglement with the living land and those of the land who intra-act with it. Ancestors do not refer to the “forbearers”, or “those who have come before us”, as the OED details; ancestors continue to live like fallen leaves of the Mimosa that nourish the tree. They have not lived, but are living. The ancestors shape Kgotsitsile decisive act of ‘hearing’ them and ‘seeing’ them when they speak, in their modes of utterance, whether consciously or unconsciously. The utility of Tswana and southern African languages in Kgotsitsile’s poetry replenishes the soil of creativity, and offers a kernel with a living and throbbing life force, imbuing future generations with a granary to sustain lineages. The ancient ones, as Lebogang Mashile asserts in the prologue of this chapter, plait their stories into the futures of their children. A plait is an intricate and tight weaving that gestures towards durability. Therefore the indigenous resource base is entwined in the memory of the living who seek to plait stories into the future of their children.

Madikeledi, Kgotsitsile’s maternal grandmother, and her daughter, Kgotsitsile’s mother, plaited stories of the lineage into his future. He is aware of this as he proclaims that “everything [he] write[s] is tied up with some kind of wisdom [he] got from them in that hostile environment” (in Rowell, 1978: 23). British colonialism and its imposition of colonial education reinforced modernity’s erasure. From an early age Kgotsitsile understood the

“arrogance” of colonialism that fuelled their ships to cross oceans with nefarious intentions to expand their empires through violent processes that rendered natives pariahs through colonial alienation. Madikeledi’s warns Kgositsile, “boykie / don’t ever take any nonsense from *them* / you hear!” (1971: 81). The excesses of “nonsense” revealed themselves throughout Kgositsile’s life. In Raditladi’s historical drama *Motswasele II* he saw the nonsense of a tyrannical leader who needed to be overthrown, and used it as poetic license to overthrow any tyranny in his life, evident in his ‘Towards a Walk in the Sun’. Raditladi’s drama was exemplary for the fight against the erasure of land, language and memory. Raditladi’s text notated what Madikeledi said.

As in the epilogue of this chapter, “the ancient ones they use their hands to heal the backs of broken men”, Kgositsile writes of Madikeledi that she articulated “things more solid / than the rocks with which those sinister / thieves tried to break our back” (ibid). How could Madikeledi discern white supremacy’s capitalism? Because her own ‘son in law’, Kgositsile’s father, was a victim of cheap labour exploited by an unjust colonial capitalist regime which alienated him from his family. Kgositsile reflects in the same poem, “how could I know her sadness then / or who broke my father’s back?” (ibid). He found out soon enough, and was politicised from a young age by these events. His father’s back was broken by that system, which in turn attempted to break his back; but Kgositsile protested against this tyranny as he was warned by his grandmother. The decisive moment of never working for a white person again immediately after matriculating was shaped by the wisdom of the ancient matriarch.

The deliberate choice of ancients ‘saying’, as opposed to ‘writing’—that is, “the ancients say”, and not “the ancients wrote”—makes a case for oral traditions and their place in living memory. Through plaiting stories into Kgositsile’s future, Madikeledi made sure the untranslatable could be translatable through the transformative and generative resource of his language. Kgositsile understands the plaiting of histories in the future of children to translate into political consciousness: “I hear her [Madikeledi] now. / and I wonder / now does she know the strength of the fabric / she wove in my heart for us?” (1971: 81). He ‘hears’ the ancients speak across the Atlantic, their voice louder in exile. The wind that blows from memory carries a song, and he continues weaving “for us”: to record history for posterity. The scriptural economy of language is at once trumped and the complex woven plait of orality becomes a productive space. It also trumps colonial politics of time as “the elegance

of memory [...] is larger / than the distance between / my country and I” (ibid). This is what makes him conclude that “distance separates bodies not people”—a philosophical life-affirming principle that embraces continuity than segmentation of land and its people, language and place, past and present, and OED’s static memory and living memory.

Through the act of writing what the ancients show and say Kgosisile translates it “for us”. It is an act of recovery and appeasing the ancestors. Living memory also materializes in his quest to forge pan-African solidarity, and he addresses his diaspora brothers and sisters, “there are memories between us / deeper than grief. There are / feelings between us much stronger / than the enemy machine that breaks / the back” (1971: 81). He soon realised that the breaking of backs, black backs, is how race and modernity were made. He was exiled from his country only to end up in the centre of American capitalism and imperialism, and saw the harrowing effects of dispossession and erasure first hand. In that moment he urges his diaspora sisters and brothers to heed the voice of the ancients: “sister, ... / pry your heart open, brother, mine too / learn to love the clear voice” (ibid). He recommends a multi-sensory perception—listening with the heart and reading there a strong fabric woven by the ancients, because there they will find “places between us / deeper than the ocean, no distances” (ibid).

Through listening to Madikeledi’s voice and reading the fabric she wove in his heart beyond her grave, he carries with him the oral tradition of his people and Tswana literature when he leaves South Africa for exile, and from these learns that they are not only produced but productive, not only generated but generative, not only formed but also transformative. He invigorates these archives through *translation* in the black diaspora, and they make his work stand out in black international periodicals, necessitating a different lens of reading those print cultures previously identified as Afro-American. For example, the praise poem form became a vehicle for diaspora consciousness and intimacies. The strategic transformation of the oral tradition resource base enriched his engagement with Afro-American and larger black diasporic cultures, and “made or fertilized the ground” for him “to be receptive immediately to people like Malcolm [X], [Frantz] Fanon, and others”, as he realised that “it opened up in [him] memories of earlier wisdom during [his] young years. [He] recalled a lot of things [he] had read in Tswana and Sotho literature which, later [...] informed the music or the rhythm in [his] work” (ibid: 30). Thus his poetry interweaves the indigenous African resource base with diasporic artistic traditions, showing us that the exploration of roots is not

necessarily incompatible with the tracing of routes in examining the relationship between the two traditions of artistic expression.

Whatever the ancients say is considered mythological, as it is premised external to modernity's knowledge production and frame of intelligibility, rendered primitive and backwards. Kgositsile grants legitimacy to what the ancients say and transmute their wisdom into a transatlantic circuitry of exchange, demonstrating the utility, sophistication and universal nature of that wisdom. The mythological narrative of the ancients recovered in Kgositsile's short story 'Ab/original Masks' illuminates why 'Towards a Walk in the Sun' is possible and necessary. It reveals that while 'Towards a Walk in the Sun' is about liberated futures, it is also about reclaiming a mythological realm of existence, working between simultaneous living past and futures. It enables through animism to engender a double location of time. This is part of what was appealing to the grandfathers of hip hop The Last Poets when they searched through the Black Arts Movement's (BAM) 'bible' *Black Fire: An Anthology of Afro-America Writing* in search of a name. Kgositsile's poem published therein sated their appetite to appease an African past in the present, while envisioning and beckoning a liberated future.

6.2 Kgositsile: Counterculture to "Counterculture to Modernity"

Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic* was my point of departure, where I showed that the positioning of roots and routes and hence black nationalism and black Atlanticism in binary opposition in that book presented problems in the reading of Kgositsile's poetry. Those problems have been shown to directly feed into black America's status as a vanguard of black modernity on which Africa models itself, in diaspora studies¹²⁷. Further, the impact of that emulator-emulated relationship is that it has overlooked the rich transnational texture woven by black South Africa and black America's long-standing relationship. The oversimplification of that exchange has perpetuated the view of a one way flow of influence from North to South. Through Kgositsile's life and work I have demonstrated how his engagement with black America was dynamic, and how in a lot of ways he was a pivotal figure who represented the Afrika they sought to appropriate in figuring their identities

¹²⁷ As Laura Chrisman rightly puts it, "Gilroy's own work does not argue the utility of diasporic modernity for continental Africa, nor does he suggest that Africans seek to emulate African Americans. But this is exactly the vanguardist spin given to black modernity in Africanist work as diverse as Manthia Diawara's and Ntongela Masilela's" (Chrisman, 2002: 2).

during the black power and black arts period. I have shown how his work published widely in black international periodicals advocated a geopolitical frame of pan-Afrika, in which Afro-Americans yearned to insert themselves. They hence learned and rehearsed his poetic to align themselves with the decolonial politics of the continent.

Kgositsile's oeuvre collapses the binary between roots and routes, and by so doing showing that nation-centred conceptions of culture, exemplified by his Setswana archive, are compatible with the values of black Atlanticism that Gilroy espouses. The reading of his aesthetic choices and the presence of Setswana in his work point us to southern Africa, and presents it as a referent in critical studies of black arts in America. The exclusion of nationalist and ethnic-specific influences in the making of the counterculture of modernity is challenged by Kgositsile's work in this study. I have shown that, just like Sol Plaatje in his engagement with W.E.B Du Bois (Chrisman, 2010), Kgositsile was informed by unique nationalist struggles that would in turn prove to be compatible with Afro-American ones within a pan-African framework. I have demonstrated through his life and work how nationalism is not opposed to the transnationalism that black Atlantic politics favour, and, as Chrisman has argued elsewhere, "black Atlanticism and black nationalism are interdependent, not antithetical, practices" (Chrisman, 2002: 1). I have shown how roots confluence with routes, proposing *roots en route* as a heuristic term that can enrich the reading of Africa's relationship with its diaspora, and its place in the making of black modernity.

Kgositsile's work that intricately weaves the oral and literary traditions of both cultures reveals that we cannot be satisfied with reading black Atlantic cultures as the "counterculture of modernity". His range of influences leads us to an era and regions that were sites of black modernities. Enrique Dussel (1998) argues that modernity actually emerged in the so-called peripheries. Gilroy suggests that we "shift the centre of debate away from Europe, to look at other more peripheral encounters with modernity" (Gilroy, 1993: 108). However, Gilroy, in this summation, ends up conceding modernity to be a "solely European or North Atlantic phenomenon" (Olver & Meyer, 2011: 5), once again reifying Africa and relegating it to a timeless past. As Laura Chrisman notes, this threatens to foreclose than expand critical studies of diasporic cultures. This is owed to "the mystification of 'black Atlantic'" being "inextricable from the mystique of 'modernity'" (Chrisman, 2000: 12). She deems them "the

twin components of a transatlantic aura” (ibid). This aura is directly linked to Africa’s exclusion in the making of modernity.

I have argued and demonstrated in this dissertation how Kgositsile comes from other inflections of modernity that confluence with black modernity in America. That, in fact, black modernity is underpinned by dynamic “global flows that express the particular history of Atlantic exchanges”, as Titlestad (2004: xiii) argues. I have demonstrated this dynamism through multivalent flows of influence from black South Africa to black America in Kgositsile’s relationship with Raditladi’s *Motswasele II*’s, and how the flow stream of collective consciousness flows from oral traditions into Raditladi’s drama, into Kgositsile’s poetry, into The Last Poets’ lyrics, which in turn become a resource base, in the tradition of black expressive cultures, for the emergence of what would become rap music. For example Flava Flav of Public Enemy proclaims, “I used to listen to Redd Foxx albums way back in the days [...] and Gil-Scott Heron—man, he’s one of my idols. But my biggest poetic influence is the Last Poets” (Dery in 2004: 420). Afrocentric rap group Public Enemy¹²⁸ emerged in the 1980s and is recorded as “one of the most successful and influential groups in the history of rap” (Walser, 1995: 193).

This is a stellar example of how African oral traditions, previously considered backwards and by so doing polarising “tradition” with “modern”, are a productive, generative, and transformative, and are invigorated by Kgositsile in the making of black modernity in the second half of the twentieth century. The range of influences also point to other inflections of black modernities: the *Drum* writers’ influence on Kgositsile also point to another inflection of black modernity which is exemplary of *roots en route*; as does the texts that came out of Makerere conference of 1962, which in itself was a defining moment in the production of black modernity. Kgositsile’s thrust in the Student Nonviolence Coordinating Committee, his bridging of anti-colonial movements on the continent with civil rights movements in America show that his pivotal presence functioned as a geo-political frame for pan-African solidarity,

¹²⁸ “In 1988, Up-And-Coming director Spike Lee was planning his third feature film. In *Do the Right Thing*, racial tensions come to a boil on a hot summer day in Brooklyn’s Bedford-Stuvesant neighbourhood. Lee wanted a *potent* hip-hop anthem to serve as the theme song. ‘I wanted it to be *defiant*, I wanted it to be *angry*, I wanted it to be very *rhythmic*’, Lee later recalled. ‘I thought right away of Public Enemy’” (Chris Neal, ‘Fight the Power’. *Music and Musicians*, 2010: 78; my emphasis). The potency, defiance, anger and rhythm can be mapped in the black expressive archive to The Last Poets, Kgositsile, Raditladi, and Setswana oral traditions; which means Kgositsile’s work shaped by Setswana oral and literary resources also made an impact on Afro-American cinema—another inflection of black modernity that points to southern Africa. Perhaps this can be taken up at a later stage by myself or other Kgositsile scholars.

pointing us to South Africa too in our reading of anti-Jim Crow America. These cultural and political moments feed into the dynamic effects of Kgositsile's poetry, and his presence in the Black Arts Movement, his contribution to both the literary and musical practices of Afro-America, mean that we have to necessarily look to South(ern) Africa for other inflections of what Gilroy has termed the "counterculture to modernity".

Brent Edwards's (2003) "practices of diaspora" whose central question is language has provided a framework to read these transatlantic exchanges marked by *difference* not as a problem, but as a productive space to be read in *translation*. This is in recognition of the fact that diaspora's underpinnings are movement, also of political exiles and their ideas which emerge out of other nationalities and languages. This means their literatures, such as Kgositsile's, are possibly marked by historical appropriations and cultural retainments. Edwards argues that "black periodicals were a threat above all because of the transnational and anti-imperialist linkages and alliances they practiced" through using "translation [as] one of the ways the 'turbine' of the cultures of black internationalism is lubricated" (Edwards, 2003: 9). The example of Kgositsile's impact on MDALI (Music, Drama, Arts and Literature Institute) is a case in point for this argument.

Formed in 1972 in Alexandra, South Africa MDALI aligned themselves with "prideful black poetry" which "added African percussion instruments", and that 'virile' poetry resounded "African strength and anger; they liked to talk of *spears pivoting in the punctured marrow of the villain*" (Wylie, 2008: 43; my emphasis). Their mood of combat was evidently fuelled by Kgositsile's poem, 'Towards a walk in the sun', while he was still in exile. They read his poem from the robust circuitry of black periodicals that moved in the ANC underground. That poem which transformed Setswana oral and textual sources spoke directly to the hearts of MDALI members, in 'their language', as it did members of The Last Poets. This shows the dynamism of Kgositsile's text, and the generative and transformative nature of his indigenous archive. This example most importantly, points to makings of black modernity on both sides of the Atlantic (one might argue that the Soweto Poetry era linked to the Black Consciousness Movement is itself a 'counterculture to modernity'), and how that cannot be oversimplified.

My research on Kgositsile's life and work has excesses. Moving forward this dissertation can provide foundation for the studies of what Andries van der Vlies calls the "textual Atlantic"

(2007), whose focus on Atlantic *textscales*, playing on ‘*landscape*’ which echoes Robolin’s *Grounds of Engagement*, can provide illuminating ways to map how texts travel in transnational circuits, and become transformative. The above example that place MDALI and The Last Poets, hence Black Power and BCM, in conversation is a case in point. The generous intertextuality in Kgositsile’s poetry can itself be read as a *textscape* that can provide a rich site of research within transatlantic studies. I also envision the emerging field of the anthropocene providing powerful tools and frames for reading animism in Kgositsile’s poetry, which can enrich research on ‘race and post-humanism’. What does it mean, for instance, to read Kgositsile’s work with a post-humanist lens? What are the limitations and overdeterminations of a post-human lens when reading work that is fighting against the dehumanization of the people? How can we start to talk about post-humanism when black America’s struggle for citizenry in their country in the 1960s and 1970s became Kgositsile’s own, and is still a struggle to date? These are the questions which I hope will be taken up moving forward.

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